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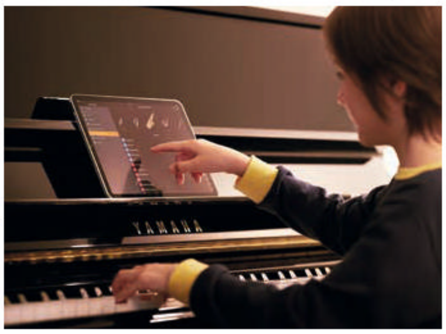

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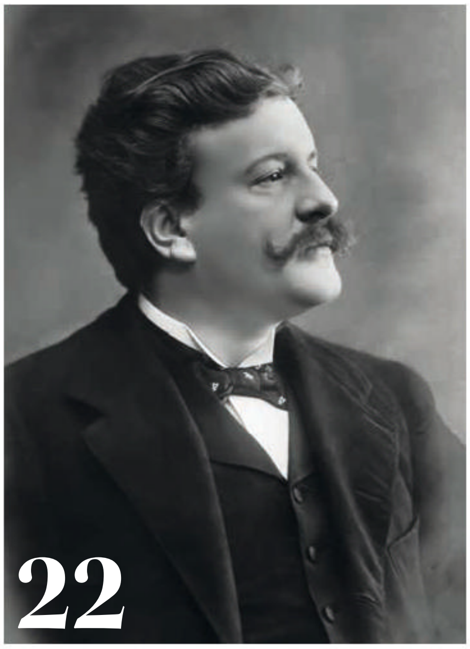

5 EDITORIAL
Celebrating variety in concert programmes

6 Q&A
Some quickfire questions for Martin Roscoe

7 NEWS & NOTES
The launch of the 2023 BBC Proms; Lukas Genušas records the original version of Rachmaninov's First Sonata; a prize for Ariel Lanyi; *Gramophone*'s centenary concert

10 ONE TO WATCH
The Ukrainian winner of last year's Honens Competition, Illia Ovcharenko

12 IN BLACK AND WHITE
Pianos and royalty

14 ILL-TEMPERED CLAVIER
Charivari laments unimaginative concert programming and longs for a return to recitals that balance erudition with entertainment

32 ARTIST FOCUS
Simon Mundy chats with Christian Blackshaw about performing music that is greater than it can be played

34 PERSONAL TOUCH
Having recorded the complete piano sonatas by the Australian composer Geoffrey Allen, Murray McLachlan talks about what makes this music distinctive and worth exploring

38 RETURNING TO THE PIANO
VII – Speed (Part 1)

SHEET MUSIC

40 Repertoire Rarity
Henselt's La Gondola, Op 13 No 2

47 New Music
Nikki Iles's Blue Lagoon

50 BEETHOVEN FOR FOUR HANDS
Jeremy Nicholas discusses Scharwenka's Beethoven arrangements with Tessa Uys and Ben Schoeman

52 IN FULL SWING
Chiyan Wong talks to Owen Mortimer about recording jazz-influenced works by Ravel and Tsfasman

54-60 NEW RELEASES
Critic's choice, new recordings and sheet music

61-64 IN CONCERT
Live reviews of events in London, Lucerne and Hastings

66 MUSIC OF MY LIFE
Danny Driver digs out some old recordings that have most influenced him

SPECIAL FEATURES

16 ZLATA CHOCHIEVA
Tim Parry talks to the Russian pianist about her latest album and her studies with Mikhail Pletnev in Moscow

22 THE CASE OF MORIZ ROSENTHAL
In the latest in our series on 'Polarising Pianists', Bryce Morrison examines another mixed legacy on record

24 DANIEL GRIMWOOD ON HENSELT
Having for years championed the music of pianist and composer Adolph von Henselt, Daniel Grimood talks to Jeremy Nicholas

28 LIGETI'S ÉTUDES ON RECORD
Jed Distler offers a fascinating survey of the Études of György Ligeti, who was born 100 years ago. Which version should you listen to?

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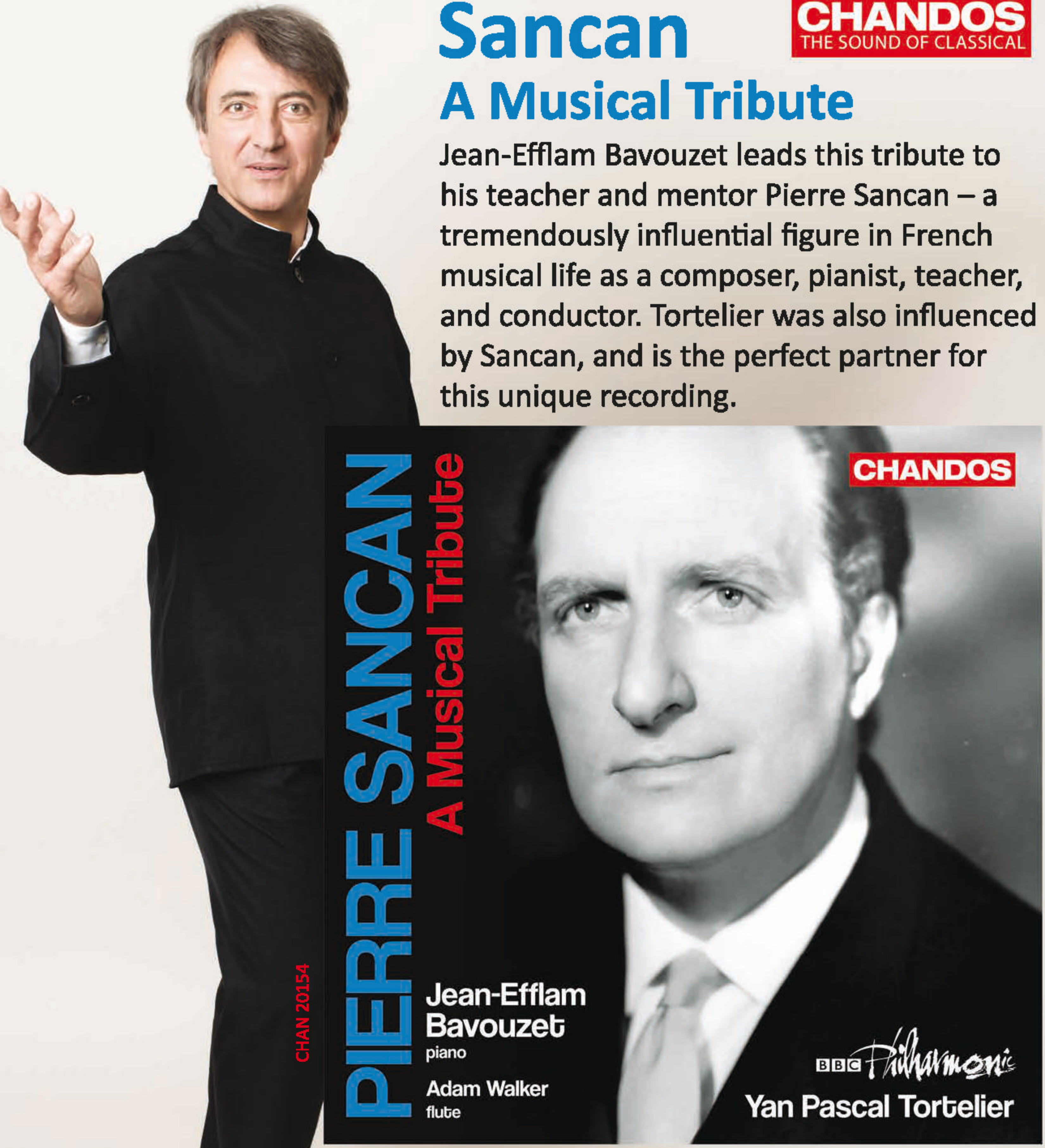

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STAY IN THE KNOW

What's on the programme?

I have been reflecting on the varied approaches to concert programming among today's pianists. Prompted by Charivari's polemic on pages 14-15, which raises interesting questions about the relative values of current pianists and those of another age, I found myself feeling instinctively defensive of those pianists who choose to programme, say, the last three sonatas of Beethoven or Schubert. Like Charivari, I relish programmes that celebrate a rich and diverse repertoire, that seek to nourish but also to entertain. But, just as one has certain expectations in an opera house, I think there is something special about hearing a great pianist play Beethoven's Opp 109-111 (indeed, if only concert promoters would allow it, adding Op 106) in a single evening. It makes for a specific kind of event, of course, and it's not something I'd want to hear from every pianist, but in the right hands such a programme not only has artistic validity but makes for a profound experience. This kind of programme is not exclusive to our own age, either.

I suspect there has been a tendency for concert programmes to duplicate those of recordings. A CD of Beethoven's last three piano sonatas makes perfect sense – certainly in the pre-streaming days of building a record collection. One could say the same of Chopin's Ballades or Scherzos, or his complete Nocturnes, which I've heard played as an evening's concert at least twice in recent years. These make obvious records, but I think treating these works as individual masterpieces in concert is to be encouraged. To that extent I agree with Charivari – it is easy for any pianist to use a concert as a means of running in their next recording programme, or recapitulating their last, but concert programming should be more imaginative than that.

Ligeti was born 100 years ago this month and we mark the occasion with a survey of the composer's Études on record, with Jed Distler as our authoritative guide (see page 28). This marks the first of a series where we will explore the recorded history of important piano works, with recommended listening. These will be a bit like the Collection feature in *Gramophone*, although the works involved might be more specialist or focused, or simply shorter. A number of such pieces are in the pipeline, but if there are any that you'd like us to cover then do drop me a line.

Tim Parry, *Editor*

International Piano offers a rich mix of inspiration and guidance to pianists and piano fans around the world, from dedicated amateurs and students to professional pianists, teachers and aficionados.

Celebrating the piano in all its forms, including the fortepiano and digital keyboards, each edition of our magazine is packed with interviews, features, news and reviews showcasing the top artists of today and yesteryear. Practical advice for players runs the gamut from articles on technique and repertoire to learning resources and study courses, plus the latest developments in piano technology.

Our goal is to draw together the fascinating strands that make the piano such a popular instrument, enhancing every reader's knowledge and supporting those who strive to master its challenges.

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International Piano *meets* Martin Roscoe

ERIC RICHMOND

Who were your principal teachers?
Marjorie Clementi and Gordon Green at the RMCM/RNCM.

Beyond your teachers, who have been the biggest musical influences on you?
I was fortunate to hear Sviatoslav Richter, Radu Lupu and Clifford Curzon in their prime. Some unforgettable performances. I had a few sessions with Alfred Brendel when I was 21 and this was very influential. From 2005 to 2015 I worked with Peter Cropper in a trio with Moray Welsh which was very inspiring.

If you could take just one recording to a desert island, what would it be?
Cortot playing Chopin's Third Impromptu.

What was your most recent musical discovery?
I used to have a low opinion of Franck's *Prélude, Chorale and Fugue*. Having taught it a couple of times I decided to learn it. My earlier opinion was completely mistaken. It is a masterpiece!

What was the last thing you were practising?
John Adams's *Road Movies* for violin and piano.

Which solo piece would you most love to learn but haven't yet got around to playing?
Schumann's *Humoreske*.

Which piano concertos should be heard in concert more often?
Lutosławski, Szymanowski's Sinfonia concertante (Symphony No 4), Strauss's *Burleske*, Dohnányi's Second Concerto.

Which composers are the most underrated or wrongly neglected?
Thinking only of piano music, Dohnányi, Fauré, Szymanowski, Grieg, Sibelius and Nielsen – and there are many others!

What are the major works you're playing over the coming months?
Bach's *Goldberg* Variations.

Do you have a personal favourite of your own recordings?
I'm not often pleased with my recordings but I am very proud of my recording of Beethoven's 'Hammerklavier' Sonata.

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Pianists at the Proms

The 2023 BBC Proms will see performances from an array of star pianists. Marking the 150th anniversary of Rachmaninov's birth, this season will include 11 of the composer's works including four of the five works for piano and orchestra (only the Fourth Concerto will be missing). Sir Stephen Hough will play the First Concerto (18 July), Benjamin Grosvenor the Second (6 August), the blind Japanese pianist Nobuyuki Tsujii, joint winner of the Van Cliburn Competition in 2009, plays the Third Concerto (8 September) and Yuja Wang will appear with the *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini* (4 August).

The First Night (14 July) will feature Paul Lewis playing the Grieg Concerto with the BBC Symphony Orchestra and Finnish conductor Dalia Stasevska. The list of pianists is impressive, and many works from the core repertoire will be heard. Jan Lisiecki will play Beethoven's Third Concerto with the BBCSO and Elim Chan (25 July), and Isata Kanneh-Mason plays Prokofiev's Third with the BBC National Orchestra of Wales and Ryan Bancroft (1 August). Sir András Schiff appears on consecutive nights with the Budapest Festival Orchestra and Iván Fischer, with the Schumann Concerto (12 August) and Bartók's Third (13 August). This will mark a quite a piano-centred week at the Royal Albert Hall: Martin Helmchen plays Brahms's Second on 14 August, Alexandre Kantorow performs Beethoven's Fourth on 15 August, Seong-Jin Cho appears with Chopin's First on 16 August, and Pavel Kolesnikov plays Shostakovich's Second on 18 August.

Other performances to look out for include Jean-Yves Thibaudet with the Boston Symphony Orchestra and Andris Nelsons in Gershwin's F major Concerto on 26 August, Alexander Melnikov playing Mozart's A major Piano Concerto No 23, K488, with Les Siècles and François-Xavier Roth (20 August), Kirill Gerstein's performance of the Piano Concerto by Thomas Adès, with the Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra and Vladimir Jurowski (31 August), and finally, the UK premiere of Mason Bates's Piano Concerto, performed by Daniil Trifonov with the BBC Symphony Orchestra and Gustavo Gimeno (30 July).

In addition to these concerto appearances, Benjamin Grosvenor gives a solo performance at the Royal Albert Hall on Sunday 16 July, at 11am, with an adventurous programme – opening with Liszt's *Réminiscences de Norma*, he then plays Leonard Borwick's transcription of Debussy's *Prélude à l'aprés-midi d'un faune*, followed by Ravel's *Le tombeau de Couperin* and *La valse*.

Benjamin Grosvenor appears twice at this year's Proms, playing a solo recital and Rachmaninov's Second Concerto

MARCO BORGGREVE

Ariel Lanyi wins Buchbinder backing

The Austrian pianist Rudolph Buchbinder has announced the winner of the 2023 edition of the Swiss piano prize 'Prix Serdang'. This is not a competition in the traditional sense but is awarded on merit to a promising young pianist in recognition of their achievements. The 25-year-old Israeli pianist Ariel Lanyi has won the prize, which includes an endowment of 50,000 Swiss Francs (about £45,000), impressing Buchbinder especially with his performance of Beethoven's 'Hammerklavier' Sonata. Originating during the pandemic, the 'Prix Serdang' was first awarded in 2022 to Martin James Bartlett, and is intended to provide support for a young pianist and as an investment in artistic creativity. Buchbinder commented: 'Ariel is at a decisive point in his career. When I got to know him, he struck me as a serious young man who makes a very mature and authentic impression. I am convinced that the "Prix Serdang" can serve as an important incentive for him.' Ariel Lanyi's delight is evident: 'When I was notified that I was chosen to be the recipient of this year's "Prix Serdang" I was overwhelmed with emotions of elation and gratitude. Moreover, when I learned about how the selection was made, and that the panel had followed me for a while and delved into my artistic activities, my gratitude intensified. To have an artist of the calibre of Rudolph Buchbinder trust me with this prize is an honour which surpasses what I can describe in words.'

Lukas Geniušas records original Rachmaninov

Lukas Geniušas: reviving the original version of Rachmaninov's First Piano Sonata

JEAN-BAPTISTE MILLOT

This month, the Russian-Lithuanian pianist Lukas Geniušas travels to Rachmaninov's house in Switzerland, Villa Senar, to record an album on the composer's own piano, an unusually long grand piano donated by Steinway & Sons to mark his 60th birthday, which has recently been renovated. The album will include the first recording of the original version of the Piano Sonata No 1 in D minor, Op 28. The news of an early version of this work – still seen by many as a poor relation of the more popular Second Sonata, whose early version has been published, in which form it has been performed and recorded by various pianists – will come as news to many people.

According to Lukas Geniušas, the difference between the original version of Rachmaninov's First Piano Sonata and the published version, which was shortened by more than 100 bars, is not just a question of length. 'There is a lot lost between the first and second versions', he explains. 'Rachmaninov played the first version of his First Sonata, completed in 1908, to fellow musicians in Moscow. Among them were the composer Nikolai Medtner and the pianist Konstantin Igumnov, who was to premiere the work. Following the remarks of Igumnov, the composer made cuts and it is this amputated version that is still played. I love this work so much that I wanted to revive the original version. The piano world knows that there are two versions of his Piano Sonata No 2 and it is a great mystery that there had never been the same understanding with the First Sonata.' The album is scheduled to be released by Alpha Classics in the autumn.

For many listeners, the First Sonata, in its published form, is a more diffuse work than the compact Second and less melodically memorable, and for these reasons – along with enormous technical demands that are not so immediately apparent and overtly showy as those in the Second Sonata – the First is far less often played. It remains one of the most undervalued of Rachmaninov's major works. Rachmaninov famously made cuts to numerous of his own works, both before and after publication, many of which are now repudiated – the cuts to the Third Piano Concerto, for example, are rarely followed these days, while many pianists have produced performing versions of the Second Piano Sonata that are effectively a hybrid of the original and revised versions (a trend began by Horowitz and followed by others including Steven Osborne and Yevgeny Sudbin). It will be fascinating to hear Rachmaninov's original conception for the First Piano Sonata, especially in the hands of a pianist with such empathy for the composer's idiom.

Wigmore Hall to host Gramophone centenary concert

On Sunday 14 May, a *Gramophone* centenary concert will be held at Wigmore Hall in London. *Gramophone*'s Editor-in-Chief James Jolly will tell the story of the magazine's first 100 years, interspersed with performances from an inspiring line-up of musicians. Among the performers on stage will be several pianists, including Bertrand Chamayou, Jean-Efflam Bavouzet and Martin James Bartlett, as well as Joseph Middleton and Malcolm Martineau. Cédric Tiberghien will also appear alongside his regular musical partner, violinist Alina Ibragimova. Other musicians appearing include the sopranos Fatma Said and Carolyn Sampson and mezzo-soprano Emma Sventelius, the Lebanese-American tenor Karim Sulayman, who will perform with the guitarist Sean Shibe, and another guitarist, Miloš. This promises to be a unique evening of celebration and collaboration, with high-class music-making. If you can't attend in person then you'll still be able to watch: the concert will be streamed live in HD on the Wigmore Hall's website, where it will be available for 30 days.

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Heart and intellect

EWAN NICHOLSON

The young Ukrainian pianist Illia Ovcharenko, fresh from winning the prestigious Honens Competition, takes New York by storm with a powerful recital combining Chopin, Liszt and music from his homeland. **Stephen Wigler** reports

In January and February this year, in New York, I heard two recital programmes (in Carnegie's Weill and Zankel halls) by the 21-year-old Ukrainian pianist Illia Ovcharenko, the first-prize winner at the Honens International Piano Competition in Calgary last year. Ovcharenko concluded the second of these programmes with Chopin's Polonaise in A flat major, Op 53, the so-called 'Heroic', among the composer's most admired and familiar pieces. I've heard this piece performed in concert by many great Chopin interpreters – Arthur Rubinstein, Evgeny Kissin, Shura Cherkassky, Maurizio Pollini, Vladimir Horowitz and Géza Anda among them – and of course I'm familiar with the celebrated recordings by Josef Lhevinne, Ignaz Friedman and others. But I can't remember being as moved by this piece as I was on this occasion.

Ovcharenko's playing was spectacular: beautifully organised and heroic in scope. Its mighty hammer strokes and unlimited virtuosity featured a breathless build-up in the famous left-hand octave passages, in which every entry had the kind of bite that can only be achieved under the hands of a stupendous technique. But even these attributes could not explain why Ovcharenko's performance affected me and the other members of the Zankel Hall audience so powerfully. In truth, it was the way Chopin's music affected the pianist that enabled him to communicate so powerfully.

'A programme should be something special,' Ovcharenko told me at lunch on the following day. 'It should be more than a collection of works in our repertory. You must use everything [to construct a programme] – heart, emotion and intellect. I dedicated that programme to Ukraine because Ukraine is always in my heart.'

Chopin's 'Heroic' Polonaise was written in 1841, 10 years after the then 31-year-old composer had arrived in Paris from Warsaw. He had left Poland just before the Russians had brutally repressed a Polish uprising to establish a free and independent state. Chopin's nationalist sympathies prevented him from returning home to his family and he spent the rest of his life looking on from the safety of Paris at what Poland was suffering at the hands of the Prussians, the Austrians and, especially, the Russians. In that part of occupied Poland, the Russians were subjecting the Poles to 'Russification'. Poles were not only being murdered and expelled, but Polish culture was itself under attack. The Polish language was banned in public institutions, including schools, as were certain types of folk dance – including the mazurka and the polonaise. Chopin's longing for Poland was expressed through his music. He chose smaller forms to express the struggle and aspirations of his people, frequently using Polish peasant dance forms such as mazurkas and polonaises, and making Polish folk music the foundation of his harmonic language. The 'Heroic' Polonaise is the most explicit of Chopin's assertions of Polish resistance. It became, as Chopin's mistress George Sand once observed, 'an international hymn for resistance to tyranny.'

It is, therefore, easy to imagine why the 21-year-old pianist would respond so emotionally to this particular piece of music and why he would relate what befell Poland in the 19th century to what was now happening in his native Ukraine. Just as Chopin was unable to return to see his family, Ovcharenko is separated from his. Five years ago, the then 16-year-old pianist left Kyiv to study with the celebrated teacher Arie Vardi in Tel Aviv – now Ovcharenko's principal residence – and in Hanover, Germany. He returned fairly frequently to visit his mother (a computer scientist) and father (a football and hockey coach). But those visits ceased in February 2022 when the Russian invasion began.

'At first, I talked to them all the time on the telephone and what they told me was happening horrified me,' he says. But the calls became less frequent as the Russian bombing and missile attacks increased. 'Now we almost never talk. The power is almost always out.'

Ovcharenko's recital programme was designed to make a statement about Ukraine. 'Music is my way of speaking up and showing my support to the people of Ukraine, wherever they are, in Ukraine or temporarily outside of Ukraine,' he told me. On the first half of the programme, Liszt's B minor Sonata was bookended by two Scarlatti sonatas in B minor: Kk27 before and Kk87 after. The first of these was like a prayer. It was followed, without a break, by the Liszt, which Ovcharenko describes as 'a giant, heroic struggle, which ends in whispering diminuendos and, finally, silence.' He continues: 'Then, from those ashes, rises the second Scarlatti sonata, singing joyously and then flying away like a bird.'

The second half of the programme was even more deliberate in intent and nuanced in design. This was an all-Slavic line-up containing nine works by two Ukrainian composers and one by a Polish composer. The Ukrainian works contained the Three Bagatelles, Op 1, each about two minutes in duration, by the now 85-year-old Valentin Silvestrov. He was considered one of the giants of late 20th-century Soviet contemporary music. But after Putin's dictatorial seizure of power in 2001, his pro-democracy views and his conviction that Ukraine should be independent of Russia put him in danger. He fled to safety in Berlin when the Russian invasion began. The other six Ukrainian works were by Silvestrov's harmony and counterpoint teacher, Levko Revutsky (five Preludes as short as the Silvestrov Bagatelles, and a 13-minute Sonata in one movement). Because Ovcharenko played the Silvestrov and Revutsky works without interruption, it was nearly impossible for listeners – other than those intimately familiar with the music – to know which composer wrote which pieces. One heard the music as a single unit. After a few seconds to acknowledge applause, Ovcharenko launched into the Chopin Polonaise.

MONIQUE DE ST CROIX

Making a statement: Illia Ovcharenko impresses with his intelligence and emotional conviction

Ovcharenko's disposition of the works in the programme's second half had interesting consequences. It made listeners recognise that Chopin's music, like that of Revutsky and Silvestrov, was rooted in Slavic soil. 'Making the audience hear the music of Revutsky and Silvestrov as a single unit and making them also aware of Ukrainian composers' familial connection to Chopin was my intention,' Ovcharenko confirmed. 'Chopin is the original inspiration for all Eastern European music in the 20th century. He occupies a position rather like that of Bach in the 18th. Apart from Bach, no other composer so thoroughly uses popular dance forms to structure his works and no composer until Bartók so thoroughly informs his harmonic language with popular folk tunes.'

Concluding his recital with Chopin's heroically defiant A flat Polonaise was Ovcharenko's way of declaring that Russia had better not try to dissolve the borders of its neighbours and had no right to impose its culture on them. 'The amazing thing to me was that the audience really understood what I was doing,' Ovcharenko said. 'Shortly after the end of the concert I began getting messages on social media. It was as if they had read my mind. The biggest achievement for a pianist is when the audience for whom you are playing is not only enjoying what you're doing, but that they're also getting it.' **IP**

IN BLACK AND WHITE

Royalty and the piano

As the United Kingdom celebrates the coronation of King Charles III, **Benjamin Ivry** reports on the history of piano-playing among the world's royal families

The uneasy mix of European crowned heads and pianism was illustrated in 1892 at the Vienna International Music and Theatre Exhibition, when the piano manufacturer Ludwig Bösendorfer performed for Emperor Franz Joseph I. As Bösendorfer began playing, Franz Joseph placed his hand on the body of the grand piano in an invasive, proprietorial gesture, subjugating the pianist, as might be expected from an absolutist monarch.

Rarely indeed has there been a pianist prince and composer like Prince Louis Ferdinand of Prussia, who produced graceful keyboard works when he was not busy fighting the Napoleonic Wars. Liszt even wrote an *Elegy* (1842) for solo piano based on the prince's themes in recognition of his rare gifts.

Infrequently, an ideal royal patron has appeared, such as Archduke Rudolf of Austria, who was tutored by Beethoven in his youth and duly received dedications for such immortal piano compositions as the *Hammerklavier* Sonata and the *Emperor* Concerto. More recently, Elisabeth of Bavaria, Queen of the Belgians, supported the arts, and the Queen Elisabeth Competition was named in her honour. Today, young Belgian royals such as Prince Gabriel and Princess Elisabeth, Duchess of Brabant list playing the piano among their avocations.

In the UK, things started well with Henry VIII, a ghastly blighter but a gifted musician. Henry owned a prototype automatic set of virginals that was described as operating 'with a wheel without being played upon'. His daughter, Elizabeth I, was expert on the virginals, as were Mary, Queen of Scots and Mary Tudor. Elizabeth I informed one courtier that her virtuosity was exercised in solitude and she 'did not play in front of gentlemen'.

Pianistic royalty: Princess Mary, daughter of George V

Queen Victoria and Prince Albert reduced pianism to an uxorious exercise in duo performance that was, well, Victorian in sentimentality. The doughty duo hammered their way through four-hand arrangements of Beethoven overtures and Mendelssohn oratorios. Reducing music to fulfilling domestic imperatives and personal quiddities, Victoria set a pattern for later generations of the House of Windsor. Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother had her daughters study the piano, and although Princess Margaret exhausted her social entourage by insisting on accompanying herself in song at gatherings, Queen Elizabeth soon set aside this pastime in favour of her lifelong passions for horses and dogs.

Diana, Princess of Wales dashed off a brief bit of Rachmaninov's Second Concerto during a 1988 school visit in Melbourne as part of a royal tour of Australia. Diana's maternal grandmother, Ruth Roche, Baroness Fermoy, was a Cortot pupil at the Paris Conservatoire in the 1920s, but apart from rare concerto appearances conducted by Josef Krips and John Barbirolli, she abandoned the keyboard to raise a family and serve as lady-in-waiting to the Queen Mother.

Charles could have done with her expertise. As a consumer rather than practitioner of the arts – aside from youthful study of the cello – he commissioned a piano concerto in memory of the Queen Mother from Nigel Hess which premiered in 2007. Slated by *The Times* in August 2008 as a 'dull, cliché-ridden, sycophantic work', the concerto was intended to evoke the personality of Charles's late grandmother. A composer of pleasant film and TV soundtracks, Hess's great-aunt was Myra Hess, whose National Gallery recitals the Queen Mother attended during wartime. Charles might possibly have believed that family ties should be all-decisive in apportioning piano commissions, just as they are in the rest of his experience.

The King once told John Drummond about Alban Berg, who died in 1935: 'You can't call that music.' But if Charles followed the precedent of royal portrait commissions and hired major modern creators – as he did Richard Rodney Bennett for another portrait of his grandmother – riotously entertaining if possibly objectionable musical portraits might result.

Why not ask Mark-Anthony Turnage, Thomas Adès or Judith Weir – the latter among the 12 composers contributing a new work to the Coronation itself – to write a piano portrait of the Duke of Edinburgh or a duo representing a dialogue between the Queen Mother and her steward Backstairs Billy? Explosive personalities, like Princess Margaret as described in Craig Brown's *Ma'am Darling* (Fourth Estate), could provide a field day for a piano composer of eccentric vigour and humour. **IP**

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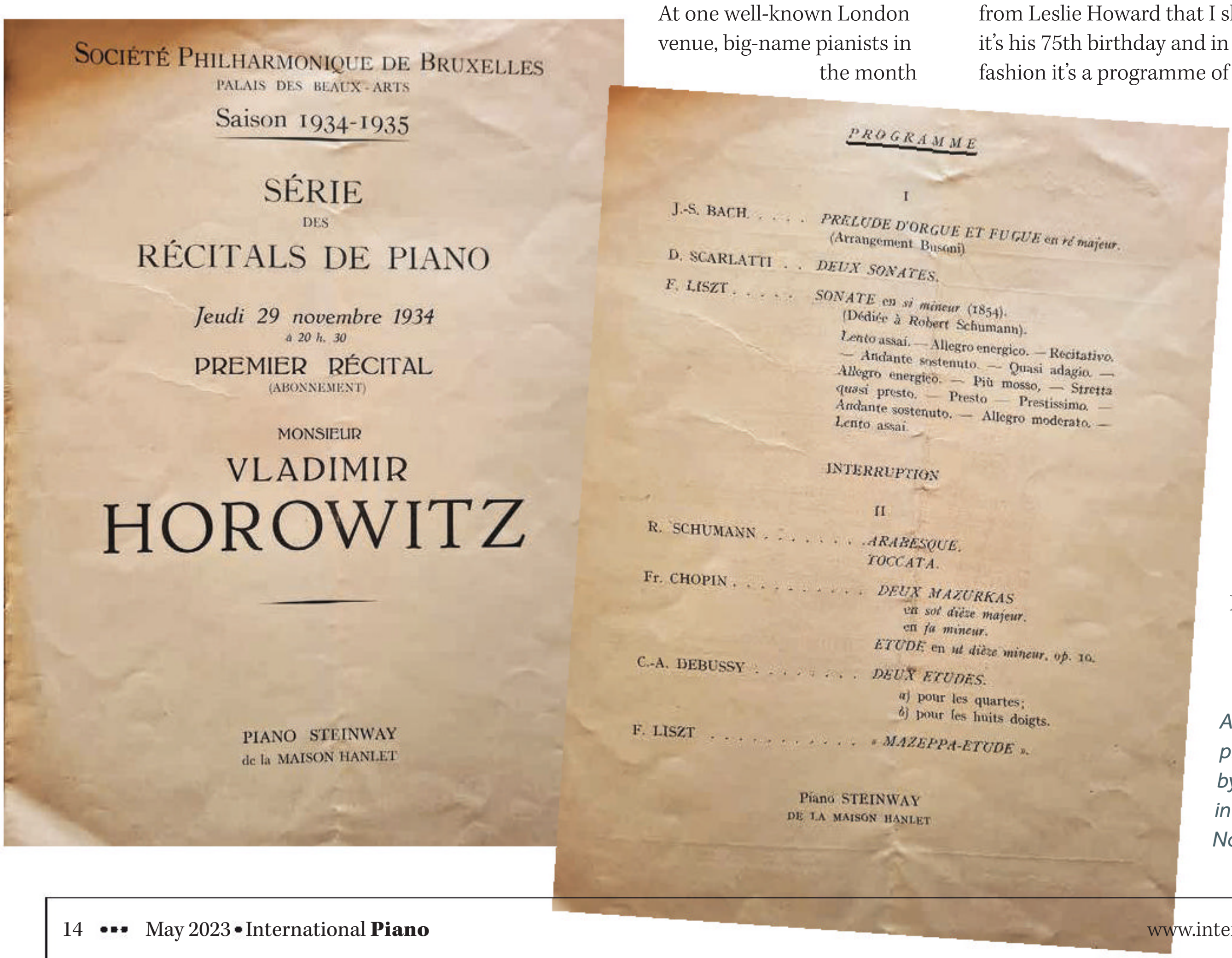
The *Ill-Tempered* Clavier

Piano recitals are boring. At least, some are. **Charivari** peruses concert programmes from another age and finds himself wishing that modern pianists were as willing to entertain

I have been looking through the listings of forthcoming piano recitals at various London venues. God, they're boring. Very few would entice me to leave the house for an evening of music that I can hear in better performances on my CD player, in the warmth of my own home and with a glass of something alcoholic in hand. And the cost, my dear! I know £30 is cheap compared to a decent seat at a football match (let alone one in a West End theatre, where the going rate seems to be upwards of £150) but that's before the travel to and from, an overpriced drink in the interval and a MaccyD on the way home.

Why aren't concert pianists more adventurous in their programming? Why do so many stick to the same tried and tested? At one well-known London venue, big-name pianists in the month of April 2023 offer programmes that rarely venture beyond familiar works by Beethoven, Schubert, Chopin and Debussy. True, there is one I spotted consisting entirely of short works by contemporary composers from the Arab world – one or two, yes, but a whole evening? – rounded off with Saint-Saëns's *Africa* (interesting, but hardly enough to tempt me). There's a big Liszt programme from Leslie Howard that I shall go to because it's his 75th birthday and in typical Howard fashion it's a programme of more or less rarely heard works by the great man. Elsewhere, Boulez? No thanks. Igor Levit? Not with the prospect of a political lecture. Just look at what you could hear in concert halls a century ago. Here is Cortot's programme for 23 March 1923 in the Royal Theatre, Liège: Vivaldi/



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MONSIEUR
VLADIMIR
HOROWITZ

PIANO STEINWAY
de la MAISON HANLET

PROGRAMME

I

J.-S. BACH . . . . *PRELUDE D'ORGUE ET FUGUE en ré majeur.*
(Arrangement Busoni)
D. SCARLATTI . . *DEUX SONATES.*
F. LISZT . . . . . *SONATE en si mineur* (1854).
(Dédiée à Robert Schumann).
Lento assai. — Allegro energico. — Recitativo. — Andante sostenuto. — Quasi adagio. — Allegro energico. — Più mosso, — Stretta quasi presto. — Presto — Prestissimo. — Andante sostenuto. — Allegro moderato. — Lento assai.

INTERRUPTION

II

R. SCHUMANN . . . . *ARABESQUE.*
TOCCATA.
Fr. CHOPIN . . . . *DEUX MAZURKAS*
en sol dièze majeur.
en fa mineur.
ETUDE en ut dièze mineur, op. 10.
C.-A. DEBUSSY . . . . *DEUX ETUDES.*
a) pour les quartes;
b) pour les huits doigts.
F. LISZT . . . . *« MAZEPPA-ETUDE ».*

Piano STEINWAY
DE LA MAISON HANLET

A varied and daring programme given by Vladimir Horowitz in Brussels in November 1934

Bach/Cortot: Concerto in D minor, BWV596; Schubert/Cortot: *Litanei*; Weber: *Invitation to the Dance*; Chopin: Piano Sonata No 2 in B flat minor; Debussy: *Children's Corner*; Saint-Saëns: *Étude en forme de valse*; Saint-Saëns: Étude in G minor (for the left hand alone), Op 135 No 4 (Bourrée); Albéniz: 'Seguidillas' (from *Cantos de España*); Liszt: *Hungarian Rhapsody* No 2. I would travel a long way to hear that!

How about Wilhelm Backhaus? On 15 April 1923 in the Town Hall, New York City, he offered: Brahms: Intermezzo [x2], Romance in F major, Op 118 No 5, *Variations on a Theme by Paganini*; Schubert: Fantasy in C major ('Wanderer'); Chopin: Ballade No 1; Seeling: Étude; Smetana: Polka in F major (from *Czech Dances*, Book 1); Pick-Mangiagalli: *La danse d'Olaf*, Op 33 No 2; Schubert/Tausig: *Military March* in D major.

Later that year, you could hear Josef Hofmann in Carnegie Hall playing Beethoven: Piano Sonata No 31 in A flat major, Op 110; Sgambati: *Vecchio minuetto*; Weber: *Perpetuum mobile* from Piano Sonata No 1 in C major; Schubert: Fantasy in C major ('Wanderer'); Cui: 'Causerie', Op 40 No 6 (from *À Argenteau*); Poldini: *Tourterelle*, *Chauve-Souris*; Woods: *Valse phantastique*; Hofmann: 'The Sanctuary' (from *Three Impressions*); Liadov: *The Musical Snuffbox*.

You take my point. These randomly selected programmes are a canny mix of heavyweight and lighter fare. None of them has the flavour of Holy Communion or a two-hour lecture designed to test how long you can sit without coughing. One might even dare call them 'entertaining', though that might risk them being labelled 'fun' – and that would never do, would it? Far rather err on the didactic side of things, so we can tell ourselves how clever, sophisticated and cultured we are to sit through an evening of nothing but Schubert sonatas.

But wait, I hear you cry. Where did you find these recital programmes from a century ago? You will find them on a truly astonishing website called simply Classical Pianists: classical-pianists.net. Begun in 1998, it has been assembled by a chap called Christian Johansson. To quote the homepage, you will find on it 'a rich bouquet of concert programs, articles, reviews and eyewitness accounts from across the careers of several hundred historical pianists, as well as complete discographies and partial documentation of known non-commercial recordings for their more modern counterparts … The listings document approximately 100,000 performances, spread across 28,000 sessions or concerts from 355 pianists over a time period of 300 years.'

It is a wonderful resource, beautifully presented and carefully curated. A word of warning, though. Once you start trawling through its treasures, you will find that suddenly, somehow it is now way past your bedtime and the evening has gone. Next thing, you'll be dreaming of going to a piano recital once more that, as in former days, educated, enlightened and entertained, *all in the same evening*! A programme that catered for all tastes and not just that of a pianist with limited knowledge of the repertoire and a lack of curiosity. **IP**

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Understated refinement

The Russian pianist Zlata Chochieva has quietly been building a hugely impressive discography. **Tim Parry** talks to her about her new album, her influences and her studies with Mikhail Pletnev

UWE ARENS

Warmth and modesty: Zlata Chochieva's personality shines through in both her playing and her conversation

Zlata Chochieva first came to my attention with her recording of Chopin's Études, issued by Piano Classics in 2014. To be precise, it was Jeremy Nicholas's review in *Gramophone*, in February 2015, that alerted me to this recording and to this pianist. 'One of the most consistently inspired, masterfully executed and beautiful-sounding versions I can recall,' was his verdict. I hurried to have a listen. To be sure, this is not only great piano-playing but, more importantly, great music-making, and Chopin's pioneering works emerge freshly minted, imaginatively presented yet unimpeded by an inflated sense of ego. It has personality, but this is filtered through the music rather than imposed on it.

This was in fact Chochieva's second recording, so naturally I caught up with the first – Rachmaninov's still underappreciated First Sonata and 'Chopin' Variations, also on Piano Classics. This, and her subsequent account of Rachmaninov's *Études-tableaux*, reinforced the impression of a pianist with a colossal technique that was often kept in reserve and utilised with self-effacement bordering on understatement. After a gap, her next recording appeared in 2021 on Accentus, an album of transcriptions by Liszt, Rachmaninov and Ignaz Friedman called '(re)creations', recorded under pandemic-imposed restrictions in September 2020. This, for me, is the highlight so far of an outstanding and steadily growing body of work on record. It led to a contract with the French label Naïve. The first recording of this new partnership, a programme of Mozart and Scriabin, came out last year, and the second, 'Im Freien', is issued this month.

Chochieva's humility comes through in conversation. There are filmed masterclasses on YouTube that show her warmth being matched by her modesty, and these attributes shine brightly when talking over Zoom from her Berlin home. She is genuinely thrilled by the interest shown in her work. Her new album contains an unusual combination of repertoire, with two major cycles – Schumann's *Waldszenen* and Ravel's *Miroirs* – supplemented by two Liszt études ('Feux follets' and 'Chasse-neige'), a Felix Draeseke obscurity (*Petite histoire*, Op 9), Adolf Schulz-Evler's wonderfully pianistic take on Johann Strauss's *On the Beautiful Blue Danube*, and a movement from Bartók's *Out of Doors* (the 'Im Freien' of the album's title; she plays the fourth piece, the shimmeringly atmospheric 'The Night's Music'). How did this eclectic programme come about?

'I was not initially planning a double album,' Chochieva begins. 'I wanted to create a programme that would reflect my strong connection with nature. I felt this connection ever more during the pandemic, when I couldn't meet people and everything was cancelled. I was feeling a bit lonely, and I realised that nature is what inspires me the most; this is what energises and enriches me. I was walking a lot, and taking lots of photographs, which is my hobby. And then I had the idea to learn the cycle that has always been one of my favourite works – Ravel's *Miroirs*. It's such a special masterpiece. I was taken by Ravel's quote from Shakespeare: "the eye sees not itself, / But by reflection, by some other things". In other words, we can't fully understand ourselves without a view from outside, without a mirror. And this mirror is nature. I found this idea so beautiful, and I started thinking about a programme that would reflect it.'

The five pieces of *Miroirs* paint such specific and evocative images that the connection with nature is clear. Of course, the same can be said of Schumann's *Waldszenen*. 'I'd played *Waldszenen* before, but a long time ago,' says Chochieva. 'These two cycles are the core of the programme, and it feels to me that *Waldszenen* was a model for Ravel. The structure is a little bit similar. Ravel doesn't end the cycle with "Alborada", which is very brilliant, but the last piece makes a very different kind of conclusion. This is also what happens with *Waldszenen*, but of course the two composers realise it differently.'

Despite the perceived connection, these works occupy very different pianistic worlds. The technical demands of the Ravel – especially in the penultimate piece, 'Alborada del gracioso', with its perilous repeated notes and dancing exuberance – are obvious. Such superfine and meticulous piano-writing led Michelangeli to comment famously that no piano is good enough for Ravel, yet for Chochieva the Schumann is every bit as difficult. '*Waldszenen* is so fragile,' she says. 'The textures are so pure, and any little detail that doesn't fit the picture can just ruin the whole thing. This is super tricky. The fewer notes, the more difficult it is. The Ravel is an explosion of a pianistic world – you can say it's virtuoso, but that doesn't really tell you anything.'

You can say the same of Liszt's *Études d'exécution transcendante*. The virtuoso element is encapsulated in the title, but this music is more about character than virtuosity. Just as Schumann ends *Waldszenen* with a lyrical farewell and Ravel follows 'Alborada' with the gently evocative 'La vallée des cloches', so Liszt concludes his cycle with the bleakly picturesque 'Chasse-neige', where a snowstorm leaves behind a smothered landscape, the cycle's earlier heroic energy replaced by irrevocable desolation. 'Chasse-neige' teems with difficulties – not least its sustained tremolos – but the challenges are as much musical as technical. To some extent, the same applies to the other Liszt étude in Chochieva's programme, 'Feux follets', although this lies so far beyond the reach of the average piano enthusiast that it has a particularly notorious reputation. The right hand's double notes and the left hand's leaps are enough to put off many an ambitious amateur, before one can even consider interpretative options.

History of playing transcriptions: Chochieva revels in playing orchestral music on the piano

Chochieva is only too aware of the reputation of these pieces. 'Many people don't look beyond the bravura and the difficulties,' she begins. 'Yes, "Chasse-neige" is challenging, but that's my problem. With works that are seen as super-virtuosic – it's the same with the Chopin Études – it is always a challenge to make the audience see them as musical masterpieces. The technique serves the music. These are of course very challenging, technically, but for me the challenge is to get beyond this. I don't want my audience to hear the technical difficulties; I want them to see the images that Liszt had in mind. It is more difficult to play "Feux follets" softly and musically – if you get bogged down thinking about the double notes you can easily forget that this piece is all about its distinctive sound and character.'

> ***'With Liszt, many people don't look beyond the difficulties – yes, it's challenging, but that's my problem'***

While 'Feux follets' and 'Chasse-neige' fit the theme of nature perfectly, Chochieva knows that these pieces are often presented as calling cards by younger pianists – it is for this reason that they crop up so often in competitions. 'Nowadays it feels like if you put a work like this in your programme it means that you are ambitious or you want to prove something – that you too can play these pieces – but this was not my thought at all,' she says. There are famous recordings of 'Feux follets' where speed is prioritised over character – although Liszt marks it *Allegretto*, and the 2/4 time signature can equally be read as four quaver beats to each bar rather than two crotchets. Chochieva is no slouch, but true to her word hers is a performance all about character – whimsy, half-lights and a variety of articulation – with her tempo chosen for vividness rather than velocity.

For the piano aficionado, another work on the programme stands out: Shulz-Evler's arrangement of Strauss's waltz *On the Beautiful Blue Danube*. It fits

MARCO BORGGREVE

'I'm quite old-fashioned': Zlata Chochieva is inspired by great pianists of past eras

with the general theme of nature, but I suspect that Chochieva simply revels in its luxuriant pianism. 'This is a new friend,' she tells me with a smile. 'I learnt it for the album. I have some background in playing transcriptions and this one is beautiful. It's a wonderful chance to be able to play Strauss's music on the piano. I always find it fascinating to play orchestral or operatic favourites on the piano because you feel a different perspective in the music.' And, presumably, you can do subtle things with rubato that just aren't possible with an orchestra? 'Exactly. You can be very flexible, and why not?'

Anyone who knows this piece will have a favourite recording. I wonder which versions Chochieva was familiar with, and whether she allows herself to listen widely before learning a new work. 'My working structure is not to listen to other recordings much at the beginning,' she says. 'I want to see a piece with my own personal perception, from my own view, so I don't want other interactions; I want to be alone with the composer and the text and to be able to communicate on our own, without interference. Before I learnt this piece, I heard it probably only twice. I heard it played by Mikhail Pletnev, my former teacher, which was very interesting, and then I wanted to learn it and include it on this album. From that point I didn't listen to other versions, preferring to keep in mind the orchestral version. Then, later, I allowed myself to listen to other recordings. By then they have less influence on me as my own interpretation of the piece is basically structured. This interpretation comes from my own very personal communication with the composer.'

I mention Josef Lhevinne's famous (and cut) account from 1928. 'It's extraordinary,' Chochieva agrees. 'I am fascinated by this epoch, which remains a kind of model – I'm quite old-fashioned!' It is heartening that so many younger pianists embrace this era of freedom and imagination, one that not so long ago might have been perceived as dated and vulgar. Listen, for example, to Rachmaninov's highly personal way with rubato, not least in Chopin. Even if you admire it, you can't copy it. 'As an exercise when I was younger I would try, and it's just impossible', Chochieva says. 'What impresses me most from these pianists is their sense of timing, which is incredible and so personal. For me great piano-playing is about sound and about a personal sense of timing. It is not that they allowed themselves to do anything they want – no, it's a very natural flexibility, rooted in sense, as if the music is breathing.'

This brings us to a discussion of the pianists Chochieva grew up listening to, and to her musical training in Moscow. Sofronitsky was a personal favourite, and Chochieva talks appreciatively of his flexibility of pulse

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UWE ARENS

Chochieva's intense musical training has prepared her for a range of pianistic challenges

and ability to float a singing line. 'When I was a child I heard a lot of Sofronitsky and Rachmaninov, and also Glenn Gould from another epoch. Gould was very popular in Russia – many people were fanatical about his playing. I was also fascinated by Gulda and – you will be surprised – Gieseking. I can't tell you why exactly, but I loved him, and I had many recordings. And of course Horowitz, too, was an important model. He had a unique sense of timing and an extraordinary sound.' Horowitz believed in the importance of learning from great singers, especially when it comes to phrasing, and Chochieva endorses this. 'I have always been inspired by vocal music, and when confronted by a technical problem, a sense of timing can be hugely helpful in solving things and making the music sound natural and beautiful despite the technical issues.'

Beyond these pianistic titans of the last century, two further names stand out as being of central importance to Chochieva's musical upbringing: Michelangeli and Pletnev. Chochieva cites Michelangeli as one of the most important influences on her during the years before she studied with Pletnev, a love that became even richer over time. But the most crucial years for her development, from the age of 14, were spent studying with Pletnev, a debt she is happy to acknowledge. 'The three years I spent studying with Pletnev were the most memorable and I must say that most of what I can do on the piano I learnt from him.' Pletnev invited the 14-year-old Chochieva to play Rimsky-Korsakov's Piano Concerto with him and his orchestra for a televised concert – a huge break for the young pianist. 'I was scared, of course, but when we had the first rehearsal he was so supportive, such a warm human being, which perhaps many people don't expect me to say, but this is true. He remained this way for the whole period I knew him. He was always supportive. His goal was not to impose himself as a great pianist to be copied, or anything like that. In fact, he rarely played.'

This seems at odds with the stereotype of powerful Russian teachers and the struggles of talented students to escape their influence, but Chochieva experienced things quite differently. 'Pletnev was so encouraging and wanted me to create my own world, to find my own voice,' she begins. 'This was incredible. I felt so free. I felt like this was the period when I had to become an artist. For me this meant being brave and transferring my ideas into my own sound world, and I was encouraged to do this. Pletnev would say: "I'm interested in your ideas. I don't want you to copy anyone; I want you to be brave and impress or surprise me with your ideas, and then together we will think about how best to make them work, technically." For me, this was the ideal teaching. A teacher who helps you to solve problems but wants you to find your own voice. He taught me so much about technique and sound – this was at a very high level, but he was still essentially teaching me how to play the piano, which you don't expect while working with such a great pianist.' She is referring to the nuts-and-bolts technical work that once a student reaches a certain level usually gives way to broader concerns, perhaps to a wider approach or general musicianship. Chochieva hasn't forgotten this mentorship.

Falling into the orbit of such a powerful musical personality at an impressionable age could have inhibited Chochieva's individuality, and she credits Pletnev for the fact that she was able to forge her own path. Lessons were intense, challenging and long. And not only about piano-playing but directed towards an all-round musicianship. Pletnev had just two students: Chochieva and Sergey Basukinsky, who later settled in London, where he now teaches. Chochieva describes extremely demanding but rewarding lessons: 'These were long lessons of five hours or so. We would participate in discussions and we listened to a lot of records. We listened to different pianists, and we heard a lot from Horowitz and Michelangeli – these were always at the top. Pletnev would also set challenges. For example, he would say: "Do you know the Symphony No 4 of Tchaikovsky? Play the main themes of the second movement on the piano." I was not always able to do this, but it was such a great motivation to learn the repertoire and know your way around things. This helped me a lot. He required a wide knowledge of the whole musical literature, not just piano music. This was a beautiful period and I was very lucky to be in such a small class, with only two students. He would also ask me to sight-read something I didn't know like the Messiaen *Préludes*. Then he would ask us to play different scales in each hand, so for example playing G sharp minor in the left hand and F sharp major in the right hand at the same time. This is very good for coordination. He might also get us to play one piece in the left hand and a different piece in the right hand – for example, Chopin's Étude Op 10 No 4 in the right hand, and then with the left some jazz or something else. This is really great for your brain and for making your hands independent.'

I can only shake my head and reflect on the relative mundanity of my own piano lessons. I've heard of pianists transposing the Chopin Études into different keys, so that playing them in the original key then seems relatively manageable, but this is another level of mental and physical gymnastics. As Chochieva says with characteristic understatement, by the time she went to the Moscow Conservatory at the end of her studies with Pletnev, she was well prepared.

The most obvious omission in Chochieva's discography so far is a concerto recording, and it's good news to hear that one is in the pipeline – early next year she will record Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No 2 with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra. It seems pleasingly typical of her that she is recording the Second Concerto rather than the overplayed First. This is a new work for Chochieva, so new that she's not yet played it in public. The coupling is intriguing: Mozart's G major Piano Concerto No 17, K453. Aside from sharing the same key, there are more general links between Tchaikovsky and Mozart, which, as Chochieva says with tact, would take up an entirely different conversation. By contrast with the Tchaikovsky, the Mozart is a work she has grown up playing: this was the very first concerto she performed with an orchestra, when she was seven or eight.

Now in her late 30s, Chochieva is one of the most refined and resourceful pianists around, and one of the most cultured – if she's not performing, you're likely to find her in the stalls of the opera house, or at an art gallery. Concert promoters, in the UK at least, have been slow on the uptake, and despite her recordings she doesn't yet have the profile she deserves. With new talent emerging all the time, this doesn't get any easier, and she's not alone. But there are signs that at last this is changing, and it can only be a matter of time before her growing reputation builds a cumulative momentum that extends beyond her devoted band of admirers. **IP**

UWE ARENS

Zlata Chochieva: 'Most of what I can do on the piano I learnt from Pletnev'

Intermittent magic: Moriz Rosenthal (1862-1946)

TULLY POTTER COLLECTION

Charmer or charlatan?

In another in our series examining the legacy of pianists who attract admirers and detractors alike, **Bryce Morrison** explores the inimitable playing of Moriz Rosenthal

Once again controversy – that blessed word – is the name of the game. First that aggressive plea for the 'golden age' of piano-playing with its overtones of the 'good old days' and things in the past always being better. This is exemplified by writers who cotton on to the idea that there was a time when giants of piano-playing roamed the earth, their like never to be heard or seen again (the novelist John Fowles) and by commentaries where clouds of incense erase any notion of critical perspective. In contrast there are those who believe a less tarnished, more truly golden age came later with artists of the stature of Wilhelm Kempff, Edwin Fischer and Arthur Rubinstein, alongside the kind of throwback pianism exemplified by Horowitz. Today a journalist can tell us that in terms of technique the quality of piano-playing has never been greater (he cited Daniil Trifonov and Igor Levit). But if inaccuracy, smudges, telescopic phrasing and exaggeration seem things of the past, eradicated in recording studios that sometimes resemble operating theatres, with producers on the qui vive – eagle-eyed and -eared – for all possible flaws, the argument remains that there are losses as well as gains. For old-timers the spirit of the score is sacrificed for the letter, and the results are bland and impersonal, with one performance sounding much like another. The answer surely lies in a necessary sense of progress, of changing times and attitudes, creating a different musical ethos.

Regarding Moriz Rosenthal, it is important to note that the dawn of recording came at the end of his illustrious career (he was described by Virgil Thomson, that most acute if savage of critics, as 'inimitable', though he did not elaborate). Rosenthal was 64 when he made his first recording and 77 – arguably more foolhardy than courageous – when he recorded Chopin's Third Sonata, with its strangely desiccated view of the opening *Maestoso*, a relatively stable and warm-hearted *Largo* and a desperate, buccaneering charge through the finale. More generally, Rosenthal's legendary early thunder and aplomb gave way in old age to gentler attributes, and although I would dearly love to have heard him in his prime, I remain grateful for the intermittent magic of the recordings he left to posterity.

This is particularly true of his selection of Chopin's mazurkas (Chopin lay at the heart of Rosenthal's repertoire), where his charm and affection are rarely in doubt. APR's superbly incisive collection of Rosenthal's complete studio recordings gives us four versions of the Op 42 Waltz in A flat major (the one with a teasing mix of triple and duple time) and six of the G major Mazurka, Op 67 No 1, allowing ample opportunity for aficionados to compare one performance with another. Although differences are minimal and it would be wishful thinking to say there are no swoops or swoons (almost as if the playing was interchangeable with, say, Rubinstein's first and classic set of the mazurkas), there is much personal engagement, empathy and instinct for poetry.

Pure entertainment is found in Rosenthal's *Fantasy on Themes from Johann Strauss* and *Carnaval de Vienne*, lavishly praised but overloaded confections that will prompt puritans and conservatives to join Miss Brodie (of Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*) in icy

Moriz Rosenthal remains an enduring figure in the history of piano-playing

disdain: 'For those who like that sort of thing, that is the sort of thing they like.' For others less severely inclined, the tradition for such offerings has continued long after Rosenthal's death in the repertoires of the romantically and virtuoso-inclined, including Jorge Bolet and Earl Wild. (I recall Wild's venomous attack on 'Alfie' – Alfred Brendel – as being representative of snobbery and all that is wrong with the music world.) Again, for Rosenthal as for these pianists, the score was hardly sacred and could be 'improved' with a bass reinforcement here or a treble re-texturing there. All the same, the Chopin-Liszt-Rosenthal 'My Joys' transcription exemplifies that more is often less. Although Horowitz was not immune to altering works to his own rather than the composer's advantage (his takes on Balakirev's *Islamey* and on Liszt's *Vallée d'Obermann* and *Hungarian Rhapsody* No 19), he never took things to Rosenthal's lengths.

Finally, for a further reminder that Rosenthal was truly of his time, look no further than his critical swipes and vitriol. For him the future of piano-playing looked bleak. Exploiting a pedigree that included study with Liszt and immersion in the school of Chopin, he relegated those less blessed to a lowly place in his own hierarchy. On his colleagues he was catty in the extreme. Schnabel's failure to qualify for military service was because he had 'no fingers'. Paderewski may have been impressive but – strangely enough – he was 'no Paderewski'. Horowitz received a glancing blow and a luckless pianist who failed to make the grade in Chopin's 'Minute' Waltz was thanked for 'a most enjoyable quarter of an hour'. There were fearsome confrontations with critics and with anyone who challenged his supremacy. Not that such controversy, wit or venom – call it what you will – was exclusive to earlier times. For Cziffra his critics were 'the black beetles of the mind', while Pogorelich's legendary sending of a photograph of himself accompanied with an unprintable suggestion to a critic who had dared to suggest that he was a fake circulated among agents, many of whom were convulsed with laughter at such obscenity.

And yet if controversy remains (does his playing glow more brightly or fade with the years?), at his finest Rosenthal remains an enduring figure in the pianist's pantheon; less so when he goes off at a tangent, tinkers and plays to the gallery. Again, as a pianist he was less noble or phenomenally equipped than Rachmaninov. You may long for music-making from a purer spring, but Rosenthal's way with Chopin's A flat major Étude, the second of the *Trois Nouvelles études*, is hard to resist. Here, his entirely personal quality shines out with the freedom and fantasy of another time and place, quite different from our own more classically orientated ambience. **IP**

For Rosenthal, the score was hardly sacred and could be improved

Adolph von Henselt: restoring a legacy

Daniel Grimwood has spent a lifetime promoting the music of Henselt, most recently with his editions and recording of two sets of Études. **Jeremy Nicholas** talks to him about the composer's importance to the history of the piano

Championing Henselt: Daniel Grimwood shines a light on this neglected music

A few months ago, the British pianist and musicologist Daniel Grimwood curated a Henselt day at the Royal College of Music in London. While there, he discovered that the Henselt entry in the first edition of *Grove* was by Edward Dannreuther, a German-born pianist who had taught at the College. 'It's an incredibly opinionated piece that suggests he knew Henselt. He says the Piano Concerto "is likely to survive" and that his piano trio is "stillborn". This is the sort of dusty scholarship which I sort of grew up with – and now the pendulum is swinging back the other way to a more bearable position.'

Grimwood has spent much of his career tirelessly promoting the music of Henselt in general and the Concerto in particular, a work he has played nearly a dozen times in the UK, US and Germany in both its chamber and symphonic versions. In addition, over the past 12 months he has completed a new edition for Peters of both sets of Henselt's Études (each containing 12 Studies, Opp 2 and 5), recorded all 24 for the Edition Peters label (prefacing each with Henselt's set of *Préambules dans tous les tons*), and issued a beautifully produced and illustrated *Practical Introduction to the Etudes of Adolph von Henselt*.

'It made good business sense to issue a CD at the same time as the new edition,' he tells me from his home in Kent. 'It also made sense to have an editor who was very familiar with the idiom. Now, I happen to be one of a number of pianists you could count on the fingers of one hand who play these Études as a matter of course.'

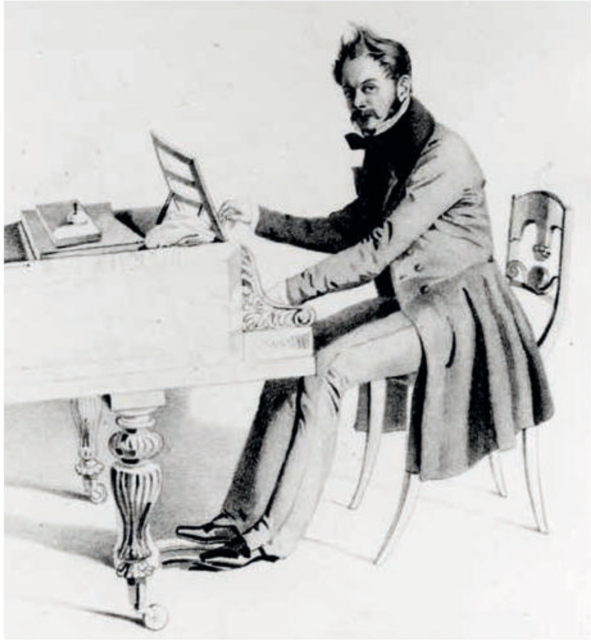
Adolph von Henselt has never entirely slipped from view but he very definitely sits below the salt, eclipsed by his friends Mendelssohn, Schumann, Chopin and Liszt on the top table. Considering the importance of his place in the history of the piano and its literature, however, the neglect of his music by generations of pianists is quite mystifying. Why is he not played more? Why does his name never appear on recital programmes? Why is his magnum opus, the magnificent F minor Piano Concerto, so rarely played? This one work might have ensured his immortality. It was the Rachmainov Second of its day. Sight-read from the manuscript by Liszt (an extraordinary feat given the difficulty of the solo part) and premiered (surprisingly, perhaps) by Clara Schumann, Henselt's

Op 16 was subsequently included in the repertoires of Hans von Bülow, Arthur Friedheim, Emil von Sauer, Louis Moreau Gottschalk, Vladimir de Pachmann and Egon Petri. It was Scriabin's graduation piece from the Moscow Conservatory. When the work was ousted by the Grieg, Rachmaninov C minor and Tchaikovsky B flat minor concertos, pianists all over the world, it is said, gave a sigh of relief. It was no longer de rigueur, its successors being far less technically taxing.

In the 20th century, the first-ever recording of Henselt's music was made in 1909 by Richard Rössler, playing Étude Op 2 No 4 ('Repos d'amour' – 22 of the études were given titles). Later, his tricky F sharp major Étude (Op 2 No 6, 'Si oiseau j'étais') won popularity through the recordings of Rachmaninov, Moiseiwitsch, Godowsky and Eileen Joyce (Godowsky recorded a couple of his other pieces, too). Michael Zadora made a beautiful disc of his solo arrangement of the concerto's *Larghetto* movement in 1931. Otherwise Henselt was all but ignored by the recording industry until the recordings of the Concerto in the late 1960s, first by Michael Ponti and then, a few months later, by Raymond Lewenthal. Since then, there has been a trickle of Henselt recordings, most notably albums of solo works by Rüdiger Steinfatt (slightly heavy-going), chamber works from pianist Claudius Tanski and friends on MDG, the Études from Piers Lane on Hyperion, and the Concerto and *Variations de concert*, Op 13, from Marc-André Hamelin (also on Hyperion). A fourth iteration of the Concerto has been recorded by Paul Wee, which will be released by BIS later this year or early next.

These performances in the studio have not been translated to the concert hall. One reason may be that scores are still not easily accessible, making Grimwood's new editions especially valuable (there is otherwise no complete Op 2 on the market). 'The studies have a lot of what I call "dead end" difficulties,' he tells me, 'that is difficulties that Henselt had developed but which other composers perhaps didn't see any point in developing further. Therefore, you really need to be imaginative about how you practise this stuff because the problems won't crop up elsewhere. When it was first suggested that I record all 24 Études, I really had to think very carefully about it. I wondered whether I was capable of doing the music justice. I'd performed three or four of the Études in recital but never the whole opus, so I had to do a lot of soul-searching before I gave my answer. But then I thought "well, no one is ever going to ask me to do this again". Then lockdown arrived and that gave me the chance to methodically prepare myself and analyse exactly what each difficulty was and to assess precisely what I had to do with my body to realise the sounds I had in my mind – which is what all practising is – but because of the nature of the difficulties, it was almost like teaching myself to play the piano from the beginning again. I knew the style very well. I didn't need to do much work on honing how I thought the music should be played.'

Grimwood recorded them in the Markgrafensaal in Schwabach with Andrew Mellor as producer. ('The man's a genius. He was wonderful to work with. He just knows how to get the best out of the piano and the pianist.') Schwabach is the town a few miles south of Nuremberg in Bavaria where Henselt was born in 1814 (the noble 'von' appellation was acquired in 1861 when he was made a hereditary peer by Tsar Alexander II). His was not a musical family but having started out on the violin before switching to the piano (as did Daniel Grimwood), he made his public debut with orchestra aged 14 and, in 1831, under the auspices of King Ludwig I of Bavaria, was granted a stipend to study piano in Weimar with Hummel and composition in Vienna with the master theorist and pedagogue Simon Sechter.

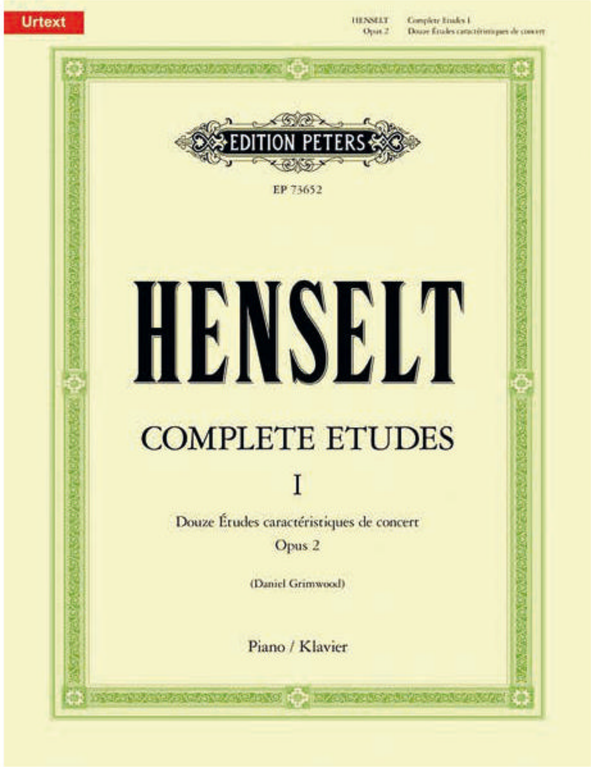


Forgotten composer: Adolph von Henselt (1814-1889) wrote his most interesting works before he was 30

The early part of his career progressed conventionally enough, though his elopement with (and eventual marriage to) the wife of the court physician and mother of four children must have raised a few eyebrows at the time. His early success touring Germany and Russia was underlined by the reception of the Opp 2 and 5 Studies, published in 1837 and 1838 (Chopin's Opp 10 and 25 had appeared in 1833 and 1837 respectively), but after the completion of the Concerto in 1844, he simply dried up. After the age of 30 he had little more to say as a composer.

In 1838 Henselt was invited by Tsar Nicholas I to make St Petersburg his home. From then until his death in 1889 Henselt spent all but the summer months each year in the Russian city, where he enjoyed a princely lifestyle and was on intimate terms with three successive tsars. In 1863 he was made Inspector General of all the royally endowed musical institutions in Russia. In *My Musical Experiences* (1880), Bettina Walker observed: 'When one takes into account that in St Petersburg alone there are five such Imperial endowments, three in Moscow, and one or more in most of the larger cities throughout this vast empire, and that, furthermore, some of these institutes count their students by the hundred (that, for instance, of Nicholas in St Petersburg, numbers six hundred pupils), we shall then

Edition Peters has issued two books of Henselt's Études edited by Daniel Grimwood



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be in a position to realise what an enormous influence over pianoforte playing throughout all Russia was thus placed in Henselt's hands. It is not, indeed, too much to say that never before has a single musician had so wide a sphere of musical activity opened to him; and though that influence extended over one single department in music's vast domain – that of pianoforte playing – still, if we consider that it was these institutes which trained all the governesses and female teachers throughout Russia, that all the musical instruction was (and still is as I write) given by teachers who had either been actually pupils of Henselt, or else been thoroughly drilled by his lady-professors, it is not too much to assume that for more than a quarter of a century his influence has been felt in more or less every home in Russia where there was a pianoforte.'

And this does not take into account the influence of Henselt's own private pupils. Among them were Rachmaninov's grandfather and Nikolay Zverev. Zverev taught Rachmaninov himself, Lhevinne, Siloti and Scriabin. Here we have the foundations of the present Russian school of piano-playing with its emphasis on singing melody and freedom of hand movement. In these respects, Henselt's contribution to the piano was at least as significant as that of Liszt and Leschetizky.

In Henselt we have the foundations of the present Russian school of piano-playing

'Teaching may not speak so directly to posterity but it does not speak any less profoundly,' Grimwood posits. 'He created, in part, a whole new way of piano-playing that was inherited by Russia. The rest, as they say, is history because Russia has produced many of the world's greatest virtuosos in the decades and century that have followed. That's his legacy as a pianist.'

How Grimwood himself became fascinated by Henselt's music and how he came to record it are two tales of serendipity. When he was eight he was taken by his violin teacher to play for her friends Richard Beattie Davis and his wife Gillian, trustees of the Purcell School, to see if it was worthwhile to audition. 'Well, I got into the Purcell and received the rest of my education there. Richard was an amazing person and, though there was a big generational gap, I counted him as one of my closest friends. He had collected all the first prints of the entire Belaieff Edition and when I was in my teens he enlisted me to help him catalogue all these dusty scores. Often, curiosity would get the better of me and I'd go downstairs to try them out on the piano and play them through to Richard. That's how I discovered the music of Felix Blumenfeld, who I've played a lot during my career. Then one day – I was about 18 at the time – he plonked the score of the Henselt Piano Concerto in front of me. My first reaction was '**** me, that's difficult!' It was really one of the most complicated things I'd ever seen. Then I started playing the melodies. It was some of the loveliest music I had ever heard. That began my love affair with Henselt. I don't differentiate between composers – whether they are well known or not. I simply play music that appeals to me. I do have an affinity with Russian music. It's got an emotional honesty.'

How he came to work with Edition Peters involved equally lucky happenstance. Some 10 years ago, for various reasons, he moved his piano into his village church in Brenchley (Kent) to give a series of eight recitals on consecutive weekends. Richard Beattie Davis, who by that time had long been considered the doyen of Henselt scholars and cheerleaders, had died in 2008. Gillian, his widow, had cut her thumb and was in the doctors' surgery where she had a conversation with a lady in the waiting room about how upset she was that she couldn't play the piano. 'The lady asked if she was a musician,' Grimwood relates. 'Gillian said she was – "sort of" – but that a friend of hers was giving a recital that weekend and would she like to come along? The lady asked what the pianist was playing. Davis told her "Balakirev. *Islamey*". The lady said she had never heard that played live and would indeed love to come along. She did so. She turned out to be the CEO of Edition Peters UK and went back to her colleagues the next day saying that they simply had to take on this pianist. So that's how all of this happened.'

What's next for the enterprising Daniel Grimwood? 'Now the two volumes of Études are published, I'll return to making an edition of the Concerto. There's a copyist's version, which is what went to print with Breitkopf & Härtel. There's another score of it somewhere else that went to B & H, but to my knowledge the score in St Petersburg is the only one that can be traced directly and unequivocally to Henselt. And that's a little difficult to access at the moment.' **IP**

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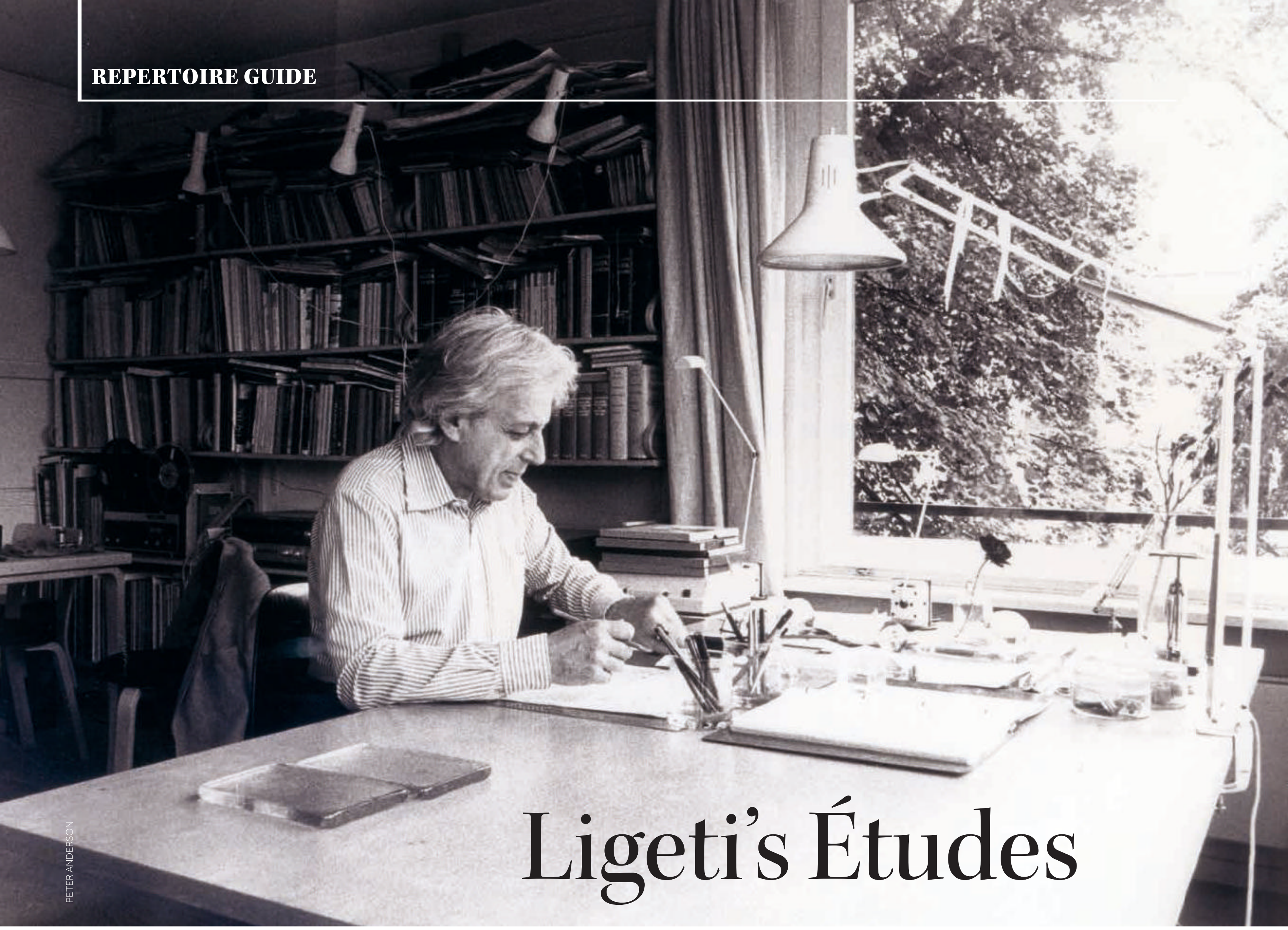


PETER ANDERSON

Combining originality and accessibility: Ligeti mingled the physical pleasure of playing the piano with his creative imagination

Ligeti's Études

A hundred years on from the composer's birth, **Jed Distler** examines the context and recorded history of György Ligeti's three books of Études

'Where does he come from? And who are his forebears?' So pondered Igor Stravinsky on the subject of Alexander Scriabin. Had Stravinsky lived into the 1980s and '90s to hear György Ligeti's Études for piano hot off the press, no doubt he would have reacted the same way.

I'll never forget first hearing the first book of Ligeti's Études shortly after they were written. The music hit this emerging composer/pianist like a ton of bricks. Such originality, such complexity, such inventiveness – yet so accessible, too, and never seeming cluttered or convoluted. It was an exciting listening experience but also a discouraging one, for how could any self-respecting composer of piano music follow that act?

In contrast to étude composers such as Chopin, Liszt, Debussy, Godowsky, Rachmaninov and Bartók, Ligeti was not a virtuoso in the conventional sense, having begun piano lessons at the relatively late age of 14. The instrument figures in few of his works from the 1950s and '60s apart from *Musica ricercata* (1951-53) for solo piano. All that changed in the 1970s, when Ligeti began teaching composition at Hamburg's Hochschule für Musik und Theater and came into regular contact with the piano, resulting in compositions including *Monument – Selbstportrait – Bewegung* (1976) for two pianos, the Trio for violin, horn and piano (1982) and, of course, the Études.

One can partially trace the Études' etymology back to Ligeti's hiatus from composing between 1977 and 1982, a period devoted to much soul-searching and stylistic exploration. In 1980 Ligeti discovered the Studies for player piano by the American composer Conlon Nancarrow (1912-97), whose scintillating polyrhythmic complexities branched out beyond playability. Through the work of ethnomusicologist Simha Arom, Ligeti immersed himself in African polyphony. Other influences both subliminal and apparent include Balinese gamelan traditions and the jazz piano styles of Thelonious Monk and Bill Evans.

Ligeti himself described how his physical pleasure at the piano and his creative imagination intermingled: 'I lay my 10 fingers on the keyboard and imagine music. My fingers copy this mental image as I press the keys, but this copy is very inexact: a feedback emerges between ideas and tactile/motor execution. This feedback loop repeats itself many times, enriched by provisional sketches. The result sounds completely different from my initial conceptions: the anatomical reality of my hands and the configuration of the piano keyboard have transformed my imaginary constructs.'

Exploring the Études

I would have given my eye teeth to witness Ligeti noodling around at the piano during the germinating stages of Book 1's opening 'Désordre' ('Disorder'), where the left hand is restricted to the black keys and the right hand stays exclusively on the white. Ligeti, of course, would meticulously work out the metrics of how each hand's phrases expand and contract independently of one another. The reflective 'Cordes à vide' ('Open strings') evokes the image of perhaps three guitarists strumming simultaneously but not synchronistically. In 'Touches bloquées' ('Blocked keys'), one hand plays rapid and even patterns of notes while the other hand blocks some of the keys in those passages by silently pressing them down. By contrast, in 'Fanfares', a steady, unchanging ostinato provides a backdrop for fanciful proclamatory phrases in myriad shapes and sizes. In the slow and jazzy 'Arc-en-ciel' ('Rainbow'), the two hands seem to operate in different spheres. Perhaps Nancarrow's influence most reveals itself in the melodic motifs, superimposed on top of one another in complex metrical layers, in the closing étude, 'Automne à Varsovie' ('Autumn in Warsaw').

Although Book 1's six études easily stand alone on their own merits, experiencing them cyclically conveys a feeling of inevitability and cumulative momentum that, if anything, strengthens their expressive impact. That's not quite the case for Book 2's eight études, whose characteristics seem best sampled as individual entities or mixed and matched in smaller groupings. 'Galamb borong' ('Melancholic pigeon' in Hungarian but also mock-Balinese, evoking the étude's gamelan inspiration) switches around the game plan of 'Désordre' so that the right hand commandeers the black keys and the left hand stays on the whites. 'Fém' ('Metal' in Hungarian) similarly mirrors the harmonic design based on open fifths of 'Cordes à vide', while the descending chromatic scales of 'Vertige' correspond to the like-minded ideas of 'Touches bloquées'. 'Der Zauberlehrling' ('The Sorcerer's Apprentice') is one of the series' high points: a compositional tour de force where rapid repeated notes run helter-skelter up and down the keyboard, requiring the utmost in technique and tonal resources to rein them in. 'En suspens' ('In suspense', Book 2's only slow étude) provides welcome lyrical respite vis-à-vis its Book 1 mirror, 'Arc-en-ciel', while 'Entrelacs' ('Interlacing') transports the polymetrics of 'Automne à Varsovie' to a more complex and elusive level.

JULIA WESELY

Setting the gold standard: the recordings of Pierre-Laurent Aimard, who worked with the composer, remain a benchmark

The dramatic and dynamic extremes of Book 2's two concluding pieces, 'L'escalier du diable' (The Devil's staircase') and 'Coloana infinită' ('Infinite column'), stand apart from the leaner and more transparent nature of the four out of six projected études that Ligeti was able to complete for Book 3. The spacious canonic lines and contrasting whirling episode of 'White on White' divert attention from the fact that the composer is only using the white keys, except at the very end. 'Pour Irina' begins gently before gathering pulsating steam and culminates with a surprisingly hushed and other-worldly *vivacissimo* passage. Imagine the enigmatic unison finale of Chopin's Piano Sonata No 2 melodically and harmonically altered and out of phase between the hands, and you'll get the gist of 'À bout de souffle' ('Out of breath'). Unlike Chopin's final *fortissimo* chords, however, Ligeti ends abruptly with five slow *pianissimo* chords. The composer's valedictory étude is a canon that's played twice: first *vivace* and then *presto impossibile*. As in the previous étude, Ligeti suddenly slams his brakes down upon the scurrying activity and draws the piece out to a quiet, deliberate and fragile conclusion.

KAUPO KIKKAS

Consistent artistry: Danny Driver's complete recording is one of the finest available versions

Pioneering recordings

Volker Banfield's pioneering recording of Book 1 still holds its own for power, authority and finesse. **Rolf Hind**'s less attractively engineered and musically drier interpretations followed shortly afterwards. **Pierre-Laurent Aimard**'s 1989 Book 1 for Erato was technically comparable to Banfield and more playfully nuanced. Aimard would go on to record Books 1 and 2 plus Book 3's 'White on White' for Sony Classical, eventually setting down the last three études for Teldec. In most respects Aimard's Sony recordings remain the gold standard. His pinpoint rhythmic control and shimmering patina in 'Automne à Varsovie' are yet to be surpassed, while the chattering upper-register passages of 'Galamb borong' seem to emanate from two different keyboards, with impactful yet mellifluous gong-like bass strokes. Aimard delineates the central tremolo murmurs and slowly soaring right-hand lines at the outset of 'Entrelacs' more effectively here than in his later Teldec recording.

One might argue that Aimard's heavier-than-desirable hands prevail over the massive dissonant chordal build-ups in 'Coloana infinită', which is not the case in **Fredrik Ullén**'s faster and more texturally transparent interpretation. The same holds true for Ullén's less emphatic, more animated 'White on White'. In 'En suspens', by contrast, Ullén takes more time to smell the flowers, figuratively speaking. On the other hand, Aimard's slower pace for 'Der Zauberlehrling' allows the asymmetrically phrased repeated notes to emerge with greater clarity and dynamic differentiation, whereas they sometimes blur at Ullén's faster clip (here Yuja Wang rules the roost – more about her later). Still and all, Ullén's strong musical personality and affinity for Ligeti's aesthetic are never in doubt. Unfortunately, the highly talented **Toros Can**'s cycle is let down by drab engineering and a shrill, colourless concert grand. Substandard sonics also render **Federico Pulina**'s 2019 recording of Book 1 uncompetitive.

Recent recordings

Rehearing Books 1 and 2 with **Idil Biret** elicits newfound appreciation for the harmonic tension she generates via her generally slower tempos. As a result, 'Cordes à vide' takes on epic dimensions, but why does Biret transpose the left hand's final bars up an octave? Her deliberation throughout 'Touches bloquées' magnifies Ligeti's varied articulations as if under a microscope. However, Biret's earthbound 'Vertige', 'L'escalier du diable' and 'Désordre' yield to the suppleness of others. Collectors seeking Ligeti's complete piano and harpsichord works in a single package might be aware of a two-disc album from Tacet featuring **Erika Haase**. Her Études don't consistently rise to her younger colleagues' high standards, although she shines in the other works.

Jeremy Denk's rhythmic vitality and probing musicianship deliver the goods in Books 1 and 2. I especially like his three-dimensional 'Galamb borong', with its buoyant pace and conversational inner voices. Although Ligeti requests that the pianist play the overlapping chromatic lines of 'Vertige' *prestissimo* and *molto legato* at the start, I'm sure that he would have been convinced by Denk's slower, highly articulated conception. For my taste, Nonesuch's close-up sonics are too strident in loud moments. Oddly enough, Dynamic's dry, analytic engineering underlines **Lucille Chung**'s gaunt precision and line-orientated conceptions, if not her God-given ability to sing at the piano.

Because the word 'hell' in German means 'clear' in English, we could call German pianist **Thomas Hell** 'Thomas Clear' – also the name of a famous American record collector and historic reissue producer. Dare I say that this pianist plays the hell out of the Études, and quite clearly at that? He shapes incisively the asymmetrical ostinatos in 'Automne à Varsovie' and 'Entrelacs', and the *détaché* phrases in 'Fém'. He doesn't set lightness and speed records for 'Der Zauberlehrling' but his slower tempo allows the repeated notes' rhythmic intricacies and imitations of electronic instruments to truly speak. Similarly, Hell's 'Coloana infinită' splits the difference between the massive Aimard and leaner Ullén conceptions.

Kei Takumi's piston-like fingerwork in the faster études and patient repose in slower selections are sabotaged by drab sonics and a piano that does not hold its tuning. But **Eric Huebner**'s recording of Books 1 and 2 benefits from Adam Abeshouse's close-focus production values and a well-regulated concert grand. Given his longstanding reputation as one of new music's key team players, Huebner's devotion to precision and textual rectitude comes as no surprise. He voices the kaleidoscopic descending scales of 'Vertige' to the proverbial nines and rings out the declamatory chords of 'L'escalier du diable' in decisive alignment against the high-register right-hand patterns. To be sure, one finds more flexible, less literal accounts of the slower études elsewhere, while others elicit more individual responses. For example, Huebner's matter-of-fact efficiency in 'Touches bloquées' yields to Denk's wittily dispatched staccato phrases and far fiercer climactic octaves. Similar observations apply to **Han Chen**'s new Naxos release containing all three books. However, Chen's world-class proficiency and steadfast fidelity to Ligeti's exacting textual requirements do sometimes yield inspired dividends, such as the gripping dynamic gradations in 'White on White', the crisply buoyant 'Fém' and the gorgeously sustained 'En suspens'.

Cathy Krier's cycle hits and misses. Her heavy-gaited 'Désordre' loses steam as it progresses while 'Touches bloquées' sounds comparably thick and monochrome, while 'Coloana infinită' struggles uphill compared with Ullén's effortless fluency. Although her double notes at the outset of 'Fém' aren't the lightest in town, her concentrated power in the high-register climax renders the ensuing quiet and slow music all the more dramatic.

Danny Driver's Hyperion recording offers the best combination of consistent artistry and excellent sonics since Aimard and Ullén. Like most pianists who start 'Désordre' at an optimistic clip, Driver's performance slackens and thickens as the music progresses, albeit not to an alarming degree. His astutely countoured polyphony in 'Cordes à vide' gives an impression of elasticity that belies the reality of his steady tempo. Relaxed repartee between the hands in 'Fanfares' equally convinces alongside Huebner's brisk and forthright traversal. Like Aimard, Driver takes time over 'Coloana infinită', while better clarifying the pitches within its murky chordal pile-ups.

Fredrik Ullén displays a strong musical personality and affinity for Ligeti

For all 18 études together, Danny Driver and Fredrik Ullén run neck-and-neck. I lean towards Ullén, mainly because his two-CD release gathers all of Ligeti's piano music under one roof. However, the first 15 études as recorded by Pierre-Laurent Aimard for Sony Classical remains a touchstone for aspiring interpreters, as well as my overall reference recommendation. But here's a hypothetical question: will the empyrean standards that Yuja Wang set in her stunning DG recordings of Nos 1, 3, 4, 9 and 10 lead to a complete cycle that may well consign her catalogue competitors to oblivion? **IP**

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

1986	**Volker Banfield** (Book 1)	Wergo WER60134-50
1989	**Rolf Hind** (Book 1)	Factory 256
1989	**Pierre-Laurent Aimard** (Book 1)	Erato ECD75555
1990-2000	**Erika Haase**	Tacet TACET129
1995	**Pierre-Laurent Aimard** (Books 1 & 2; Book 3 No 1)	Sony Classical SK62308
1996-2004	**Fredrik Ullén**	BIS BIS-CD1683/4
2000	**Toros Can** (Books 1 & 2; Book 3 Nos 1-3)	L'Empreinte Digitale ED13125
2001	**Idil Biret** (Books 1 & 2)	Naxos 8 555777
2001-03	**Lucille Chung**	Dynamic CDS358/434
2002	**Pierre-Laurent Aimard** (incl Book 3 Nos 2-4)	Teldec 8573 86584-2
2011	**Jeremy Denk** (Books 1 & 2)	Nonesuch 7559 79621-9
2011	**Thomas Hell**	Wergo WER6763-2
2017	**Kei Takumi**	Sheva Collection SH183
2019	**Danny Driver**	Hyperion CDA68286
2019	**Eric Huebner**	New Focus FCR269
2019	**Federico Pulina** (Book 1)	Da Vinci Classics C00459
2020	**Cathy Krier**	AVI-Music AVI8553036
2022	**Han Chen**	Naxos 8 574397

ANDREAS HARBACH

SI BARBER

In search of truth

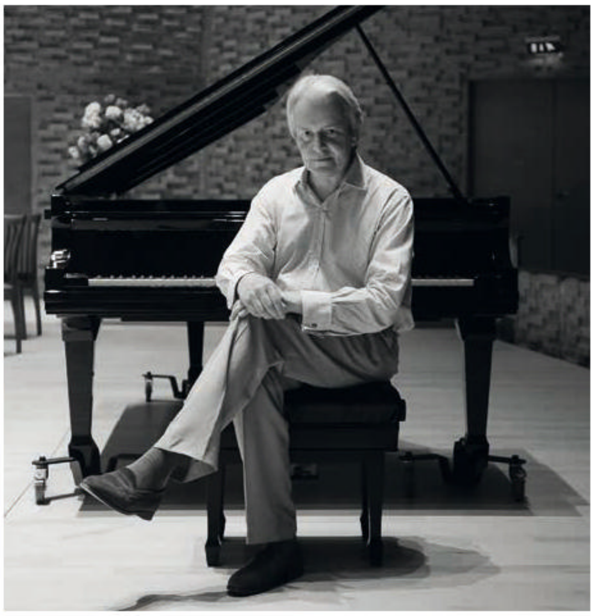
Known primarily for his Mozart-playing, Christian Blackshaw approaches great music with humility and a sense of awe. He talks to **Simon Mundy** about the psychological challenge of playing music that resists interpretation

All-encompassing fascination: Christian Blackshaw has made his name playing composers of the Classical and early Romantic eras

Classical careers can be strange beasts. It is possible to be a star pianist without being a celebrity, to be respected by colleagues and audiences without drawing continuous media attention, to have a solid body of work available for posterity without being the plaything of a global recording conglomerate. Christian Blackshaw is just such a pianist: utterly uninterested in the trappings of celebrity, who refuses to move outside his chosen repertoire for the convenience of managers. He is not unrecognised, however. He was awarded an MBE in 2019, although he is ridiculously under-recorded.

I have known him for nearly 40 years and admired his playing for longer, ever since hearing him shortly after he had been a prize-winner in the International Tchaikovsky Competition in 1978. There's a grainy video on YouTube of that competition, with him playing Franck and Scriabin, composers far from his repertoire these days. Born at the start of 1949, Blackshaw studied at the Royal Manchester College (now part of the RNCM) and the Royal Academy in London. He then became one of the few Westerners at the Leningrad Conservatory as the Cold War was at its nastiest. He does not forget the pressures that Soviet people were under then, nor underestimate those in Russia who are under similar pressure now. 'It is something you cannot avoid because we live in political systems, but I am not a political person, though I keep abreast of events.'

That grounding in Russia served him well, but when he returned to Britain he began to move away from the virtuoso repertoire of the late 19th and 20th centuries and towards the kernel of Classical and Romantic material represented by the period from Mozart to Schumann. He still has great affection for the Russian school but his own explorations lie in a different direction. 'I used to play a wide range of repertoire but once you're ensnared by these extraordinary minds, they won't let you go.' After Russia, Clifford Curzon, as Blackshaw puts it, 'rather took me under his wing'. He continues: 'He was a keyboard magician. He had such devotion to the score. I once asked



JAMES HILL

For many years Christian Blackshaw didn't dare to play Schubert's last piano sonata in front of an audience

him whom he admired. His answer was Richter, without question. Richter playing Schubert is a realisation of the way to balance the sound.'

Blackshaw and I talked about that repertoire in surroundings that were both unusual and splendidly apt: the Hotel Shelley in Lerici, the small fishing port in Tuscany where the poet had moored his boat before setting off on his disastrous trip down the coast to meet Byron in Livorno in 1822. Shelley's death in a storm on the way back was the start of a tradition of pilgrimage by Italian and British writers to Lerici and San Terenzo, the village a mile round the bay where Shelley was living that summer.

On the summer evening before our conversation, at the Lerici Festival some two hundred years after Shelley's ill-fated trip, Blackshaw performed Schubert's Impromptus and Schumann's *Fantasie*, Op 17, on an open-air stage set up on the seashore, his careful sound set against that of children playing, dogs barking, the citizens of Lerici taking their evening promenade and even the occasional raucous comment of a motorcycle starting up. None of this fazed Blackshaw, nor intimidated him into playing his *pianissimos* any louder or scuttling through slow movements. Instead, his concentration became infectious and, even outside the concert enclosure, people were settling on the benches by the sea straining to listen and children were peeping, fascinated, through the curtains of the entrances.

In many ways the Lerici Festival was uniting the ideals of those early Romantics, making the finest music radically democratic while refusing to compromise. Of the D899 Impromptus, Blackshaw says: 'I've been fearful of the first one for decades. I find it extremely difficult to remember because it has little turns in the music that could go either way. It's a work of absolute genius and balancing the voices is crucial. I spend an inordinate amount of time deciding which voices not to reject. Schumann, on the other hand, is a questing genius, struggling to express and progress. In the *Fantasie* the two voices are set in opposition to the world outside. The struggle is to triumph over adversity.'

WIGMORE HALL LIVE
Mozart
Piano Sonatas
Volume 1
Christian Blackshaw
WIGMORE HALL LIVE
Mozart
Piano Sonatas
Volume 2
Christian Blackshaw
WIGMORE HALL LIVE
Mozart
Piano Sonatas
Volume 3
Christian Blackshaw
WIGMORE HALL LIVE
Mozart
Piano Sonatas
Volume 4
Christian Blackshaw

Christian Blackshaw performed Mozart's complete piano sonatas at Wigmore Hall in London in 2012 and 2013, performances that were released on four volumes on the hall's own label

He resists too much analysis and historical comparison. 'I'm not an intellectual in any sense. For me the score is everything, as long as it is in a good edition. We have to recreate that truth. I can't really talk about playing. It's so difficult for all of us. I suppose I'm looking for the freedom to express – to work out how we can find something that is not just a recollection of private study, so that we can make it live as re-creators – and that is a matter of tiny shifts in dynamics and touch.'

He continues: 'My fascination with the great composers of that time has not diminished since I was seven. It sustains me but it's all-encompassing. I do put them on a pedestal. To touch them presents so many difficulties, mostly psychological rather than technical. I'm not sure I will ever play Beethoven's Op 111. And then Schubert's B flat Sonata [D960] is one of the greatest cornerstones. I wouldn't have dared to play it in front of an audience for 20 years but eventually you have to face it for the first time and it's a very strange feeling. There's a moment in your brain when you know you have to tackle 40 minutes of something sacred. Then we evolve, find new things and realise the line is all. It is what the ear hangs on to when the sound ebbs. I do what I feel with conviction – when performing you have to truly believe that that is what the composer wanted.'

The next time I hear Blackshaw play is at his Mozart Birthday Concert at London's Wigmore Hall in January. His cycle of the Mozart sonatas on the hall's own label, recorded a few years ago, has become something of a reference point. Again, hearing a group of them live, the lasting impression was his unwillingness to compromise, his ability to take the music to its expressive extremes without embellishment. I wondered whose music he still wanted to explore, now he is in his 70s. 'There's a genius called Haydn I need to get to grips with,' he responds. 'The great challenge is that while with Mozart everything has a vocal line, Haydn is a man of the earth. His keyboard music is associated with the soil while Mozart's is with the heavens.' **IP**

Geoffrey Allen wrote the majority of his piano sonatas in retirement in Perth, Western Australia

The pianist's Havergal Brian

Murray McLachlan offers some thoughts on recording a five-disc set of the complete piano sonatas by the Australian composer Geoffrey Allen

I'd never heard of Geoffrey Allen until Stephen Sutton of Divine Art contacted me in January 2019 and mentioned his music. Geoffrey, a nonagenarian born in Essex but residing in Perth, Australia, had written over a hundred opuses. There were 17 completed sonatas and he was keen for recordings to be made. Was I interested in taking on the (monumental) task?

Ever since my debut recording back in 1988 for Olympia of piano sonatas by Nikolay Myaskovsky, I have relished the quasi-evangelical challenge of passionately preparing, promoting and performing unknown or neglected music. The piano literature is an ever-expanding universe, with more constantly being unearthed, discovered, written or reappraised. Though it is always a huge privilege and journey to work at the standard classics by those composers who regularly appear on concert programmes, there is something especially moving, revelatory and inspiring in exploring music that has never been heard before: finding an unknown composer's voice, finding ways to make directions on the printed page convincing for the first time. It is always a tremendous challenge. Often, as was the case with the piano music of Erik Chisholm, the challenges are near Herculean (dealing with extremely complex atonal writing from bad photocopies of handwritten manuscripts) but the rewards are considerable, especially when lucidity and understanding emerge after many hours of frustration. Bafflement and angst in the practice studio fades away, and a warm glow replaces all past doubts. Conviction and clarity as a performer may be hard-won, but when they come, the pleasures far outweigh faded memories of strain!

Initial contact led to a friendly and extended email correspondence with Geoffrey himself. He proved to be an affable, modest but well-organised e-pen-pal. He was extremely succinct in concentrating an autobiography into a solitary paragraph: 'As to who I am suffice to say that I was born in Essex in 1927, so that I am now relatively ancient, went to school in Brentwood and then on to St Edmund Hall, Oxford, where I read initially chemistry and then, after two years in the army, geography. I graduated in 1951, got married, and emigrated to Australia, initially to Sydney, but after nine years there I moved to Perth, where I have lived since 1961. I earned my living as a librarian, retiring from the position of university librarian at Curtin University in 1992. I then started a literally one-man music publishing venture through which I published some 500 Australian works, including my own, until I decided I had done enough and handed my imprint, The Keys Press, on to another in 2014.'

Indeed, Geoffrey's achievement in publishing so much music by living Australian composers makes him something of a hero down under. His productivity was remarkable by any standards. As a composer in his own right he wrote a reasonable amount before retiring, but really came into his own from the late 1980s. Soon after we made contact in 2019, Geoffrey most graciously agreed to write another sonata, dedicated to me. In all during retirement he composed 16 sonatas for piano, as well as numerous other pieces. To produce such a substantial body of piano music at this stage of his life is deeply impressive, though not entirely without precedent: the English symphonist Havergal Brian (1876-1972) also wrote the vast majority of his 32 symphonies in the last three

Murray McLachlan is a tireless champion of the byways of the piano repertoire

decades of his life. Is Geoffrey Allen, through his sonatas, the piano world's equivalent of Havergal Brian? Certainly, there are striking similarities in the way both figures continued to work with energetic resolution well into their nineties. Neither Brian nor Allen was allowed the privilege of hearing many live performances of their music, but nonetheless their tenacity and productivity continued resolutely. In terms of stylistic approach, it is tempting to parallel the ways in which both Brian and Allen were able to forge their own individuality without completely reinventing the wheel. Neither embraced dodecaphonic techniques or ventured into the post-Messiaen worlds of Stockhausen and Boulez, but it would be wrong to call either composer unoriginal.

Far from it! Brian's symphonies are characterised by a sense of restlessness. Pictorial settings and characterisations seem destined never to outstay their welcome. Contrasted interruptions are essential features of many major works. In an analogous way, Allen's wrong-footing piano sonatas refrain from settling into routine. True, they use traditional structures, including sonata-allegro form. They have pitch centres. They have melodic lines. Rhythmically they can become complex, but they stay within the recognisable area of sophistication that was evident in the first half of the 20th century (one thinks of sonatas by Scriabin and Bax in particular).

Was Allen influenced by his colleagues in his adopted country? Had he found an 'Australian' voice for the late 20th-century piano sonata? Not at all, so far as Geoffrey was concerned: 'Although I came to Australia in 1952, when I was only 24, and became an Australian citizen a few years later I do not think my music is in any way "Australian". My musical language was mainly influenced by the English composers I grew up with – Delius, Walton, Ireland, Vaughan Williams, etc – and also by French music from Debussy onwards to which I am quite addicted. But there are many other composers I would acknowledge – Prokofiev, Scriabin, Hindemith, Villa-Lobos. So I don't think it is appropriate to mark me down as Australian, and in any case, music today has become quite international.'

'Allen's music takes a range of influences as points of departure'

To fully appreciate Allen's achievements we need to celebrate all his influences and then realise that his music takes these as points of departure. We can view the sonatas as works that take past conventions as a springboard, moving forwards in particular from the

GEOFFREY ALLEN
COMPLETE PIANO SONATAS
MURRAY MCLACHLAN -PIANO
métier

Murray McLachlan's set of Geoffrey Allen's complete piano sonatas is available on Métier

French and English 19th- and 20th-century composers that Allen acknowledged as influences on his style. Allen's music has an abundance of melodic motifs that are often lyrical, even 'romantic' in the sense that they can be sung with poetic feeling and intensity. But they are often subjected to accompanimental textures that can be disturbingly dissonant, fearfully unstable and unsettling. The opening of the slow movement of the Sonata No 11 is a good example of this: the melody itself is conventional in its stepwise movement. It begins in F minor, but with an added A natural at the end of the second bar, the music becomes increasingly unstable, leading with unpredictable shifts of key centres to stridently dissonant moments from bar 14 onwards. I am reminded of the opening of Busoni's first Elegy, which seems the musical equivalent of an apple gradually over-ripening, as in bar 1 C major gradually 'decays' from note to note, moving the music forwards towards its eventual F sharp major destination at the end of the first line. Allen seems to extend this approach throughout his 18 sonatas – he is something of a specialist in the art of harmonically waxing and waning in alternation from simple to complex passages. To use another metaphor, he is constantly changing the focus on his musical binoculars, oscillating in and out of tonal centres as a means of moving the music forwards with dramatic, structural and colouristic imperative. He frequently returns to melodic phrases and textures that use no black notes whatsoever. This gives many a passage a 'pentatonic' flavouring, albeit a taste that is never allowed to remain for long.

'Allen is constantly moving the music forwards with dramatic, structural and colouristic imperative'

Allen's ever-shifting harmonic language makes his sonatas extremely challenging at first, for both performer and listener. Larry Sitsky wrote that Allen's music 'looks conventional until one tries to play it, and then the pianist discovers that the patterns are quite unpredictable and don't lead where one thinks they will go'.

Indeed, this delightful, fascinatingly novel approach to harmonic movement is notable in even the smallest of chordal progressions throughout the cycle. It is one of the most intriguing and memorable features of Geoffrey Allen's music as a whole. Accidentals wrong-foot the unwary on a regular basis! In the piano sonatas quite frequently the use of flats seems at first to require 're-spelling' by the performer as sharps – until one realises that such an approach would be to completely miss the point. When Allen surprises us with chromatic notes, it is usually because he has made new colouristic discoveries. The musical 'dizziness' that often results in the mind of the prospective performer is evoked because the music challenges our inbuilt harmonic expectations.

This harmonic dizziness initially caused me considerable difficulties when I first started preparing these sonatas back in the summer of 2019. As life became ever more busy, schedules had to be revised. Recordings were delayed, and postponed again. When my daughter Rose got seriously ill, postponing everything further, Geoffrey's touching response was to compose a new set of Barcarolles, dedicating them to Rose, wishing her a full recovery.

I felt sorry for Geoffrey as lockdown reared its horrific head. Venues refused to book anyone for sessions. Would we ever get his sonatas scheduled? Geoffrey remained patiently stoic to the end, always encouraging and positive. He simply said he looked forward to hearing me play his music when something could be arranged. Finally we got the go-ahead to begin sessions in September 2021 at Chetham's School in Manchester. But with a month to go I received a disturbing note from Geoffrey saying he was unwell, but 'at 94 I can hardly complain'. Sadly he died exactly a week before we started to record the first session with his first and fifth sonatas. These were works Geoffrey had never heard played by anyone other than himself. I felt guilty that events had delayed the recording for so long, but also motivated and determined to continue and complete an extraordinary project in memory of an extraordinary figure. Eventually five CDs would be filled (the sessions at Chetham's came to an end in February 2022 with several extended days). I am extremely grateful not only to the huge patience and enterprise of the producer and sound engineer David Coyle and Stephen Guy, but also to the indefatigable patience of the piano technician Dan Carney, the generosity of Chetham's School for allowing us into the hall during holidays and free evenings, and last but not least to the unflinching support and dedication of Geoffrey's widow Trish. **IP**

See our review of Allen's piano sonatas on page 56

RETURNING TO THE PIANO

A technical refresher course for recommencing piano enthusiasts, created for *International Piano* by Murray McLachlan

VII – Speed (Part 1)

Learning to play and assimilate music rapidly is dependent primarily on sound technical foundations and awareness. If you are riddled with stiffness and have limited understanding of how to develop comfortable coordination with a relaxed posture, then velocity and rapid assimilation of notes will prove much more challenging.

In order to fly over the keyboard, begin as slowly as possible. Take time to stretch and warm your hands away from the piano. Take time to check the issues concerning physical and mental preparation that have already been highlighted earlier in this series, specifically:

- Stool height (too high if your back is bent over, too low if you need to raise your shoulders to play)
- Stool position to keyboard (too close if your elbows crush into your torso; too far away if your elbows are raised and your full arm is stretched into a straight line)
- Feet emphasis with weight (vital in order to liberate your whole body and feel that your core is engaged as you play)
- Lightness in wrists, elbows, shoulders, neck and back (no unnecessary stiffness, tension or heaviness)
- Digital dexterity (the ability to separate each finger from the other – finger independence – and, where appropriate, sufficient coordination to ensure that each fingertip can play firmly, with clarity and articulation)
- Mental clarity (the ability to focus calmly and methodically on the issue at hand, not allowing emotional anxiety or impatience to get in the way of what is required)

Less is more

As we get busier at the keyboard, we need to become calmer physically and mentally, making sure that we use as little unnecessary movement as possible. Less *is* more. We need to ensure that we are as comfortable as possible. Breathing exercises, visualisation, meditation and the cultivation of inward serenity are essential for success in developing speed.

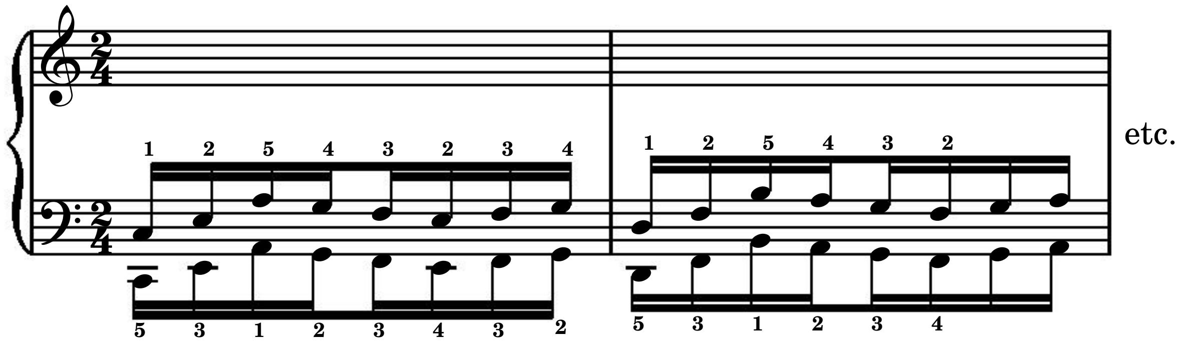
It will be much easier to remain calm if your default practising dynamic is *piano*, or even *pianissimo*. If you want to play fast, practise quietly. Straining for *fortissimo* is totally unproductive if you are trying to reach a rapid tempo. Working at a soft dynamic level is so much easier than a loud one for the development of speed. Your body will find it easier to release tension and move in smaller movements if you are practising quietly. You should find instantaneous positive results that will motivate and encourage your development further.

Of course, all of this is easier said than done. Emotionally charged humans have a hard-wired tendency to become more tense and play more heavily when enacting a determination to succeed, as if to achieve success, you should push and pull with all your might! We furrow our brows, move our heads forward, stiffen joints and play into the keys in as loud a manner as we can – resulting in failure. If we *try* to play fast, we will fail to play fast! Think of the image of a hummingbird. The movements are so rapid, economical and superbly coordinated that its wings appear static. Certainly, there is a sense of peace and stillness about hummingbirds that defies the extraordinary rapidity of their winged motions.

Bedding the keys

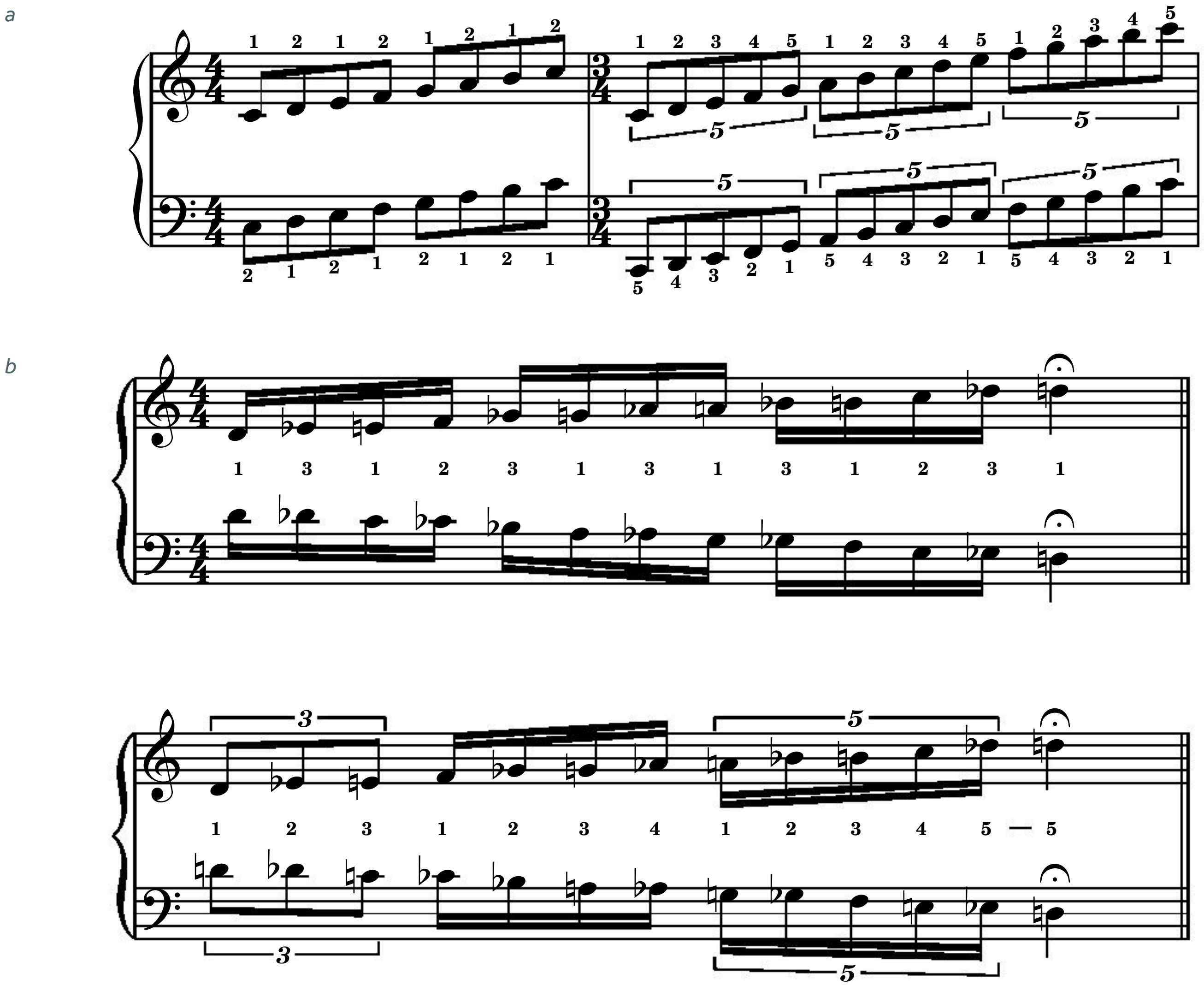
Though aspects of traditional pedagogy have at times stressed the value of bedding notes beyond the point of escapement, this approach is not helpful if you want to move up and down the keyboard faster. In fact, if you press into the keys so that it feels as though you are reaching for the wood below, you risk generating unhealthy tension. Stiffness is anathema for speed, and potentially seriously unhealthy for good posture and technique.

It is possible and desirable to build speed by playing firmly and securely – without *playing* into every note. Work with strong fingertips allied to a sense of lightness and ease. Find the point at which each note speaks and make a conscious effort in practise not to press down

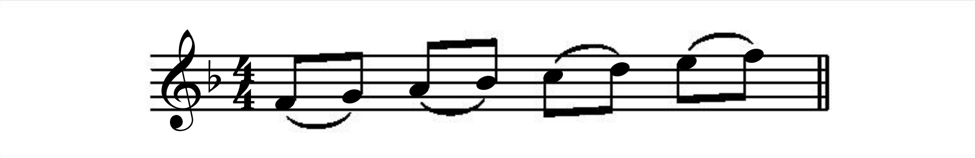


Example 1* ••• *Hanon *Exercise 3 from 'The Virtuoso Pianist'*

deeper than that. For filigree passagework you can develop a sense of release rather than depression for notes. Make sure that your fingers are over the keys in advance then move each finger towards your body. Feel that you are lifting from rather than dropping into the keys. You can work in groups of four, eight, 16 then 32 notes at a time in exercises such as the one above from Hanon's *The Virtuoso Pianist* (see Example 1). Do not involve anything beyond the knuckles in the realisation of notes here; the physical movements should feel easy, comfortable and totally natural as you 'scratch' and release sounds from the keyboard (as opposed to digging and implanting notes).



Examples 2a and 2b ••• *Slow and fast fingering of a C major scale; alternative fingerings of a chromatic scale*



Example 3 ••• *Slurred notes in an F major scale*

The metronome as a treadmill

Knowledge is power, and it makes sense to know what your capabilities are by taking note of metronome speeds that you can cope with. When you play a four-octave D flat major scale, can you manage a metronome marking of 92, with four notes to each beat? This traditionally was the speed at which grade 8 candidates were expected to realise exercises when taking that examination for ABRSM. Recording your BPMs (beats per minute) is a useful task, provided you are honest and do not write down a number that you can only cope with inconsistently. What BPM can you manage with *total* reliability? At what speed do things begin to feel uncertain? When is it simply impossible to keep going without breaking down? You can use the metronome in many different ways, but if you are keen to build up velocity then it makes sense to take a small fragment of notes first. Can you manage to play the first four notes only of a scale at crotchet=120, four notes to each beat? Can you extend that to eight notes before taking a mini break? Build up the quantity of notes you are realising – but *never* compromise on the quality of pianism being produced. Quite often difficulties with continuity occur at the precise moment you change hand position, so it is especially important to isolate these specific places and check for comfortable fingering, good coordination and excellent economy of movement. So often it can be a single move from one part of the keyboard to another that upsets entire phrases. Working with just two notes at a time and thinking of them as single movements can be effective – especially if confidence and fluency are gradually achieved via repetition and a slow increase in tempo. Patience is the byword!

Fingering

Complicated, unnatural, asymmetric fingering can severely slow you down. If you want to play deliberately and heavily, opt for as many changes of position as you can. But if speed is what you are trying to build on, then minimise the fuss. Using symmetrical fingering for each hand will make your brain happy! You will be able to process things much more quickly. And speed will increase more effectively if you are able to play without changing position too much. Try placing as many notes as possible in one hand position. Do not change position until you literally run out of fingers and have to. Example 2a gives you possibly the slowest possible fingering for a C major scale, followed by the fastest. Example 2b gives you the conventional grade exam fingering for a D chromatic contrary scale followed by Ronald Stevenson's hand group/fifth-finger slide rapid alternative. The point is that speed is easier when you have fewer vertical movements, provided of course that you have mastered lateral movement shifts and can change position either through the use of arm movement with a static hand or by lifting the hand with a relaxed wrist and economic movements. Keyboard movement was discussed in part three of this series.

Telescopic Practising

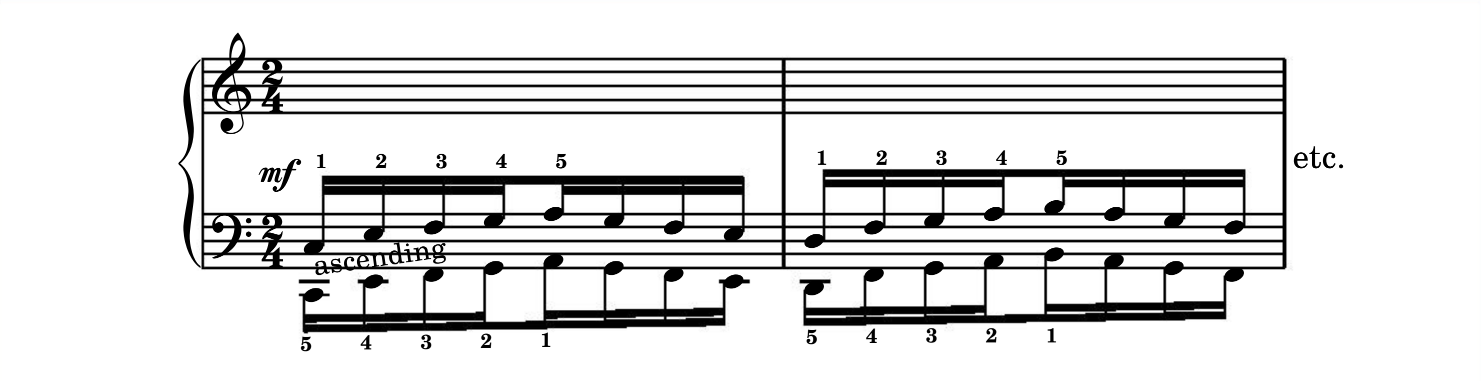
A sure-fire method of playing faster in a healthy, comfortable manner is to think in terms of large groups of notes. Taking many notes together in single gestures, losing accentuation and feeling that you have a long-distance zoom lens approach to enormous groups of notes at a time will not only increase pianistic speed, it will also enhance memory, confidence and give a wonderful bird's-eye perspective for interpretation, too.

Example 3, an F major scale, could be played with accents on each individual note. Alternatively, you could play it in paired slurs, dropping gently down on the first note, lifting the second, dropping on the third, lifting on the fourth and so on.

But you can go even further than this. In order to get in the groove of playing three, four, eight or even 16 notes at a time with one sense of movement, try dropping on the first note of three from about 12 inches above the keyboard so that the impact of playing the first note carries through in momentum for the other two. Feel as though the three notes have been played in one effortless and relaxed gesture. Extend this so that you are playing four notes. Then try and play eight notes with one initial dive for the first note only. Example 4 (the first Hanon exercise) can be usefully worked at in this way.

After accenting every note then continuing to play with paired slurs and groups of four notes, try free, light elbow movements and gestures so that your arms are totally relaxed as you 'let go' of up to 16 notes in one musical sweep.

Telescopic Practising in the above manner is also extremely useful for shaping the music you play. You should be able to breathe in and breathe out too as you play many notes in single musical groupings. Connecting technique, phrasing and breathing in this manner is a holistic, organic and confidence-building approach that should make progress in building speed as certain as it will be pleasurable. **IP**

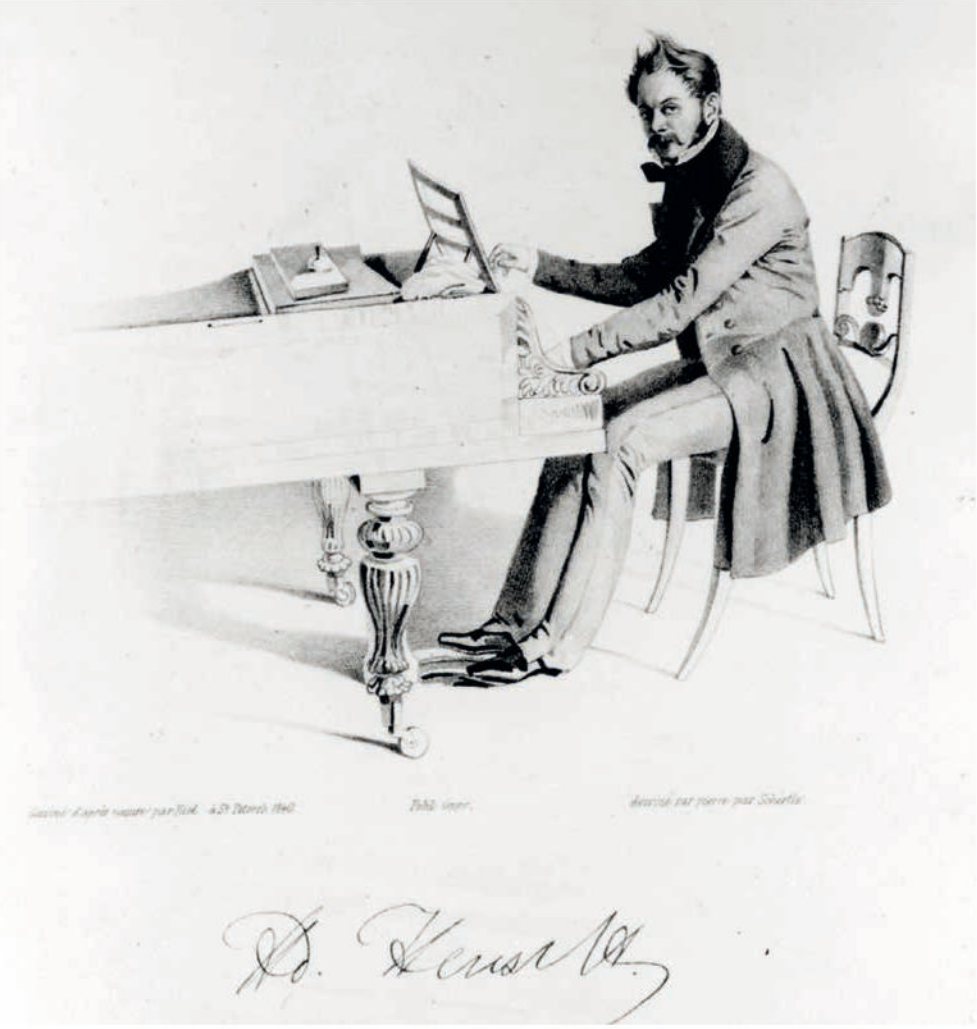


Example 4 ••• ***Hanon*** *Exercise 1 from 'The Virtuoso Pianist'*

Adolph von Henselt

La Gondola, Op 13 No 2

BY JEREMY NICHOLAS



Albert Lockwood, in his elegant *Notes on the Literature of the Piano* (1940), thought that Henselt's idiom had outlived its day and that the 'perfumed elegance and polished style are a trifle overpowering to present taste … but he is not to be despised. Henselt understood his gifts and wisely refrained from pulling a long face musically. He wrote no sonatas or fugues – only love songs.'

The Gondola is one of them. It may not be among his most important works but it was certainly one of the most popular. It appears as the second of 10 pieces collected under the banner of *Concert Études*, Op 13, each published separately between 1841 and 1858. Its companions include transcriptions of short works by Glinka, Balfe and Taneyev, and a march dedicated to 'Sa Majesté l'empereur Nicolas I par son très humble et très soumis serviteur Adolph Henselt' – the tsar who invited the German composer to make his home in St Petersburg in 1838.

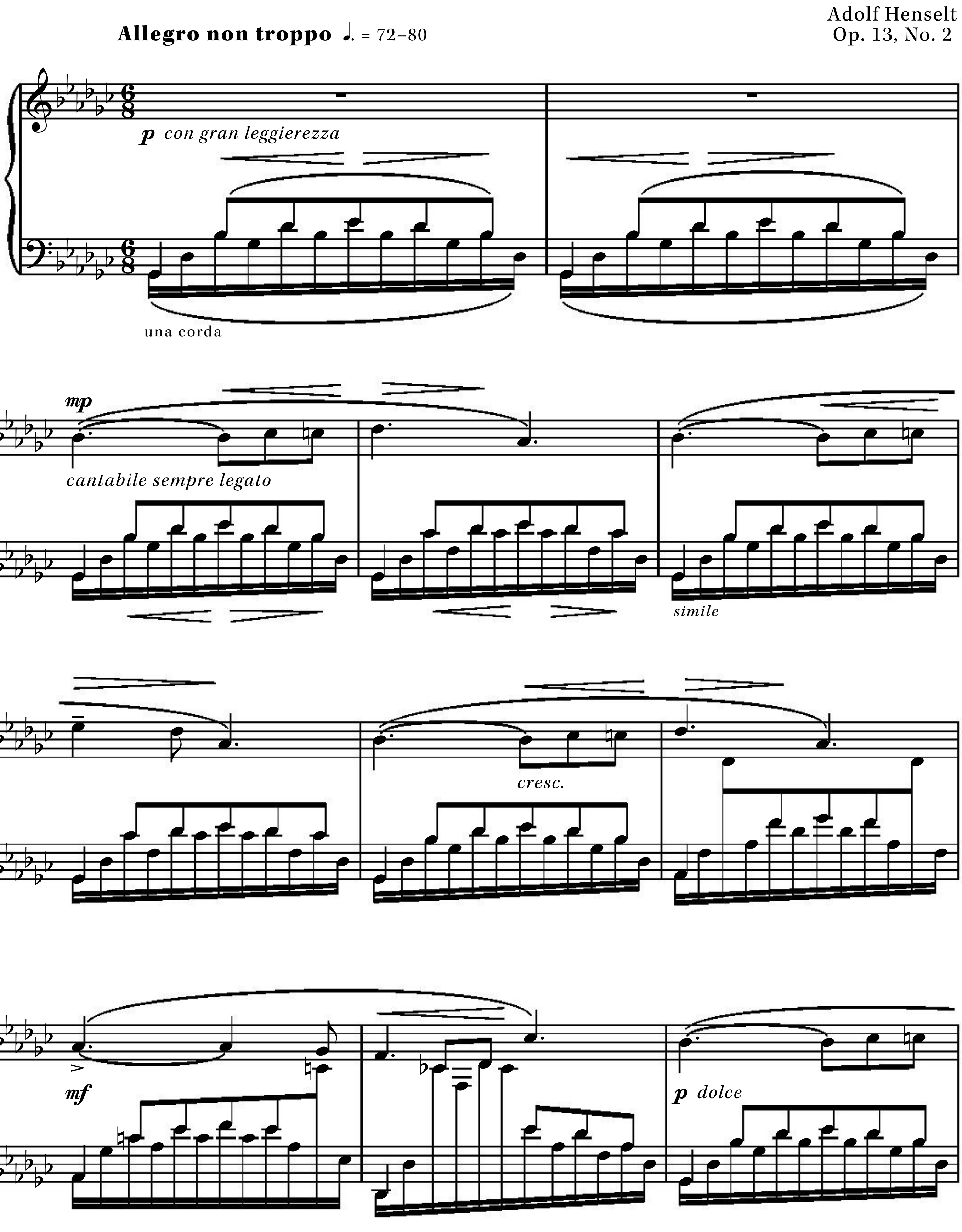
Of several editions of *The Gondola*, the one used as the basis for our reproduction here – with by far the most editorial interventions – is by Leopold Godowsky. It was made in 1916 for the Art Publication Society of St Louis, Missouri. In that same year, Godowsky recorded the piece for Columbia and made a piano roll of it. Throughout his career, Godowsky was fiercely committed to the idea of education. His association with APS began in 1912 and lasted until the late 1920s. As editor-in-chief, what had been a somewhat errant series of educationally orientated pieces under him became a heavily subscribed publication that sold all over the United States. It was work for which Godowsky was handsomely rewarded.

What the customer got was a great deal more than just the music. The title page of the APS edition of *La Gondola* (with a portrait of its composer) tells us that it is a 'revised edition with fingering, phrasing, pedaling and instructive annotations on interpretation and method of study by Leopold Godowsky'. On page one we find a biographical sketch of Henselt by Godowsky's friend Emerson Whithorne (a forgotten but important figure in American musical life) who also offered 'general information and glossary'. There are then two pages on 'form and structure and harmonic analysis by Edgar Stillman Kelley' (another once-lauded American composer, conductor and teacher). After the music itself, a sixth page is devoted to 13 'Recitation Questions' designed to keep any student on the qui vive: 'In what respects did Henselt's piano playing imitate the Hummel method?' 'Give the esthetic idea of *The Gondola*.' 'Explain why the G-natural in the bass of m. 31 was not written an octave lower.' Blank spaces were provided for written answers.

The detail with which Godowsky invested this and every other piece he edited was no less fastidious than the notation he brought to his own music. 'Though the profusion of expression marks, pedal indications and fingerings … may appear on the surface as too minute and elaborate,' he wrote, 'I believe the serious student will find them essential and illuminating.' **IP**

La Gondola
Op 13 No 2

Adolph von Henselt


Adolf Henselt
Op. 13, No. 2
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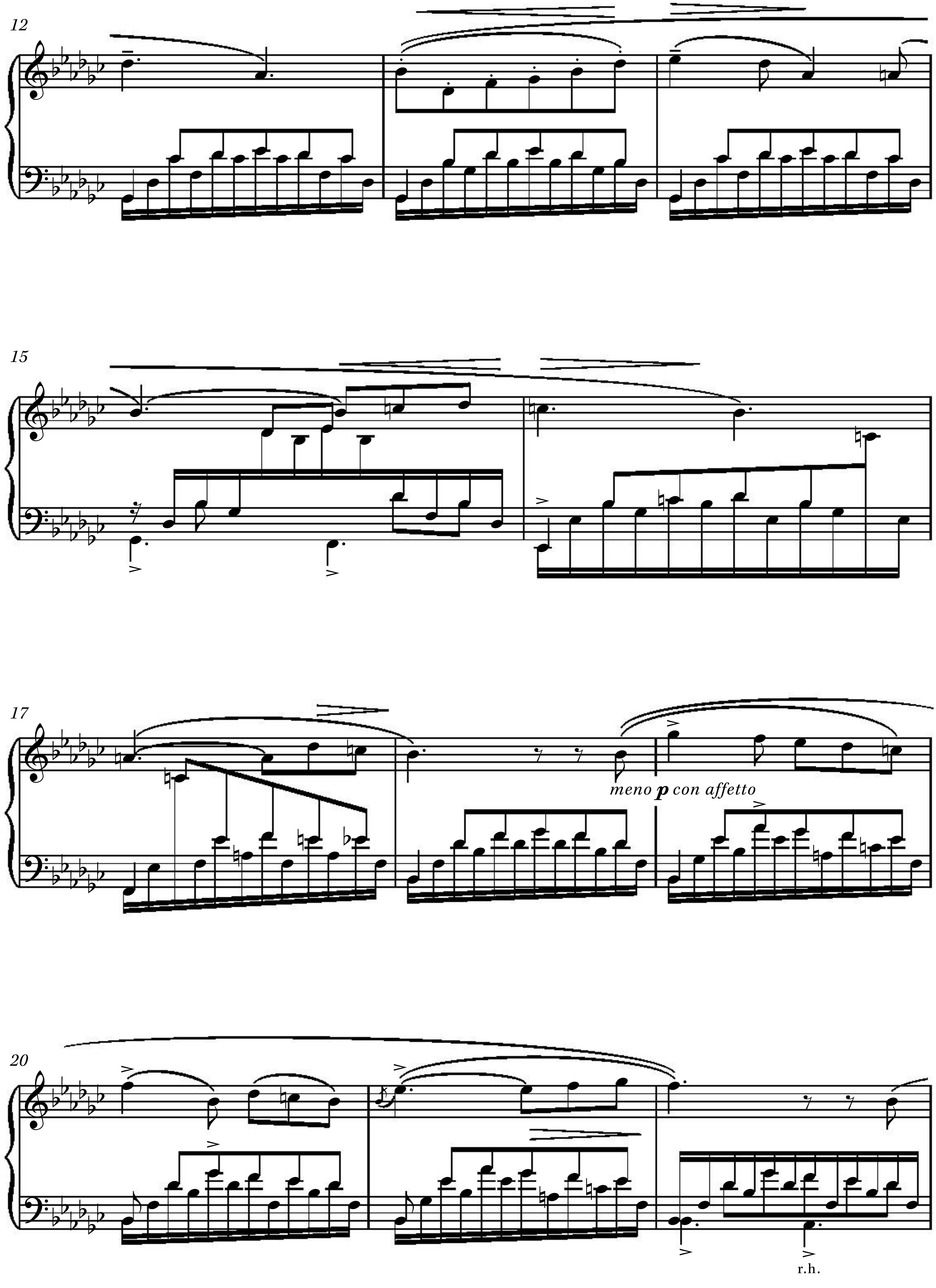
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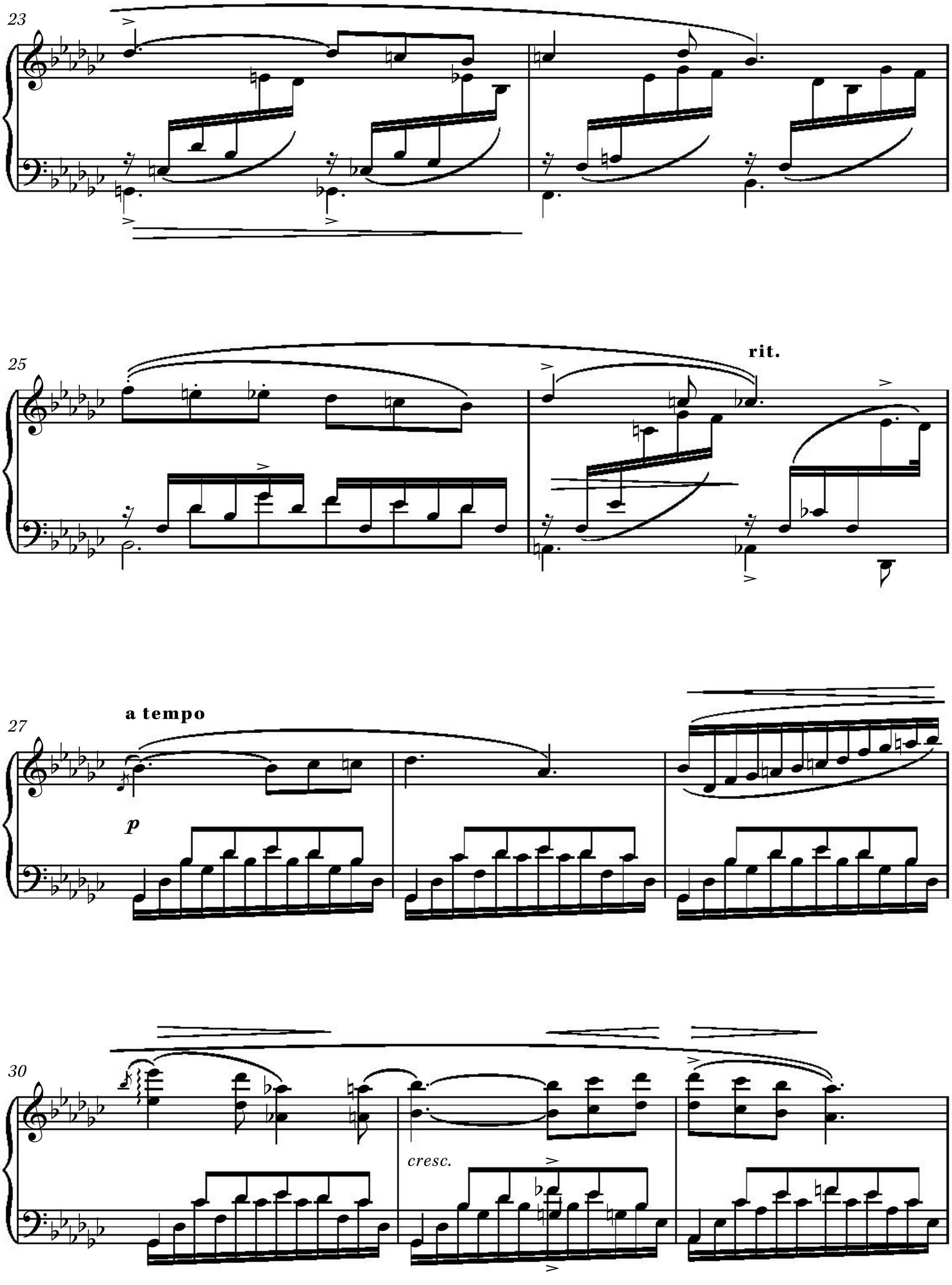
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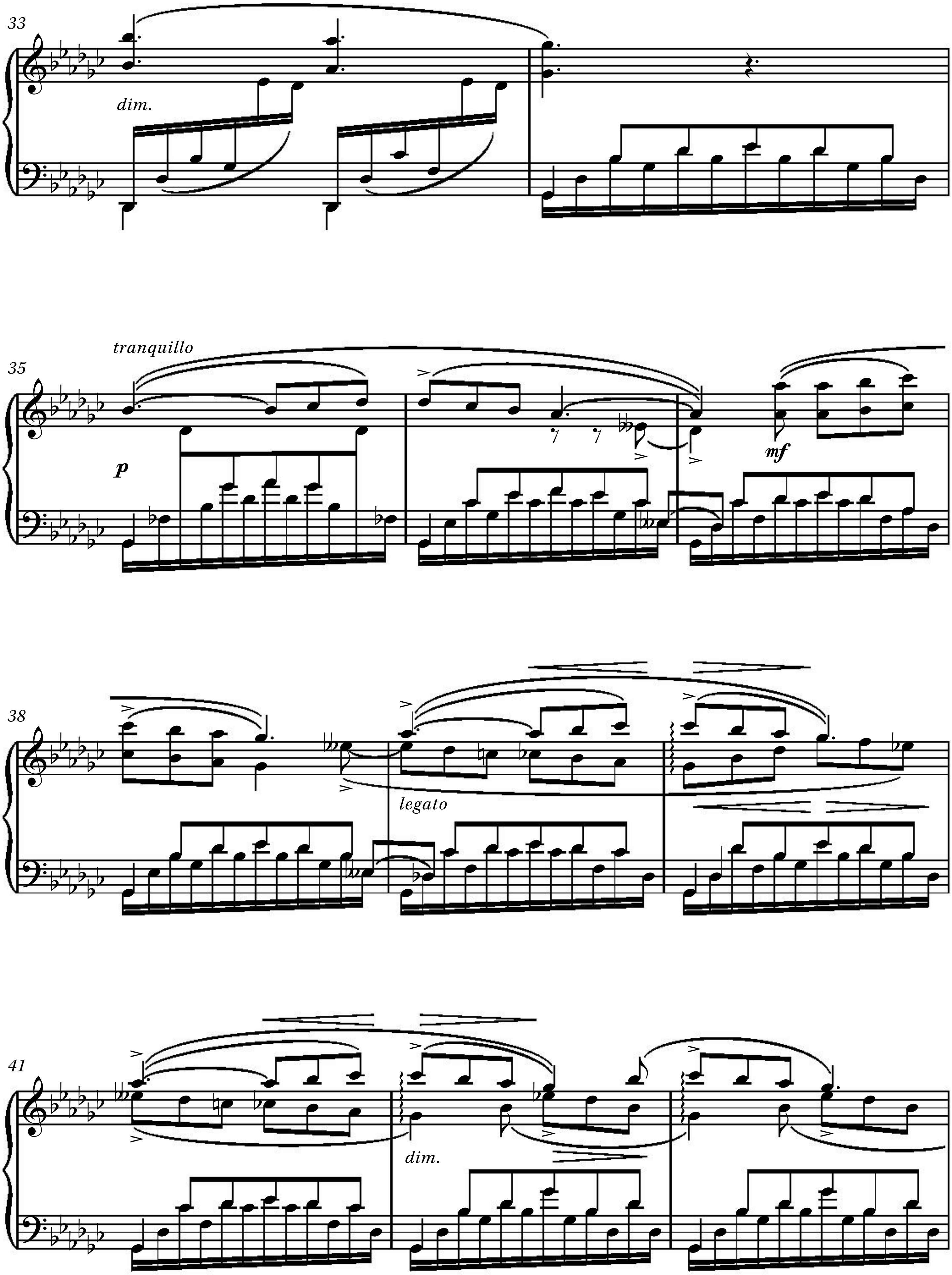
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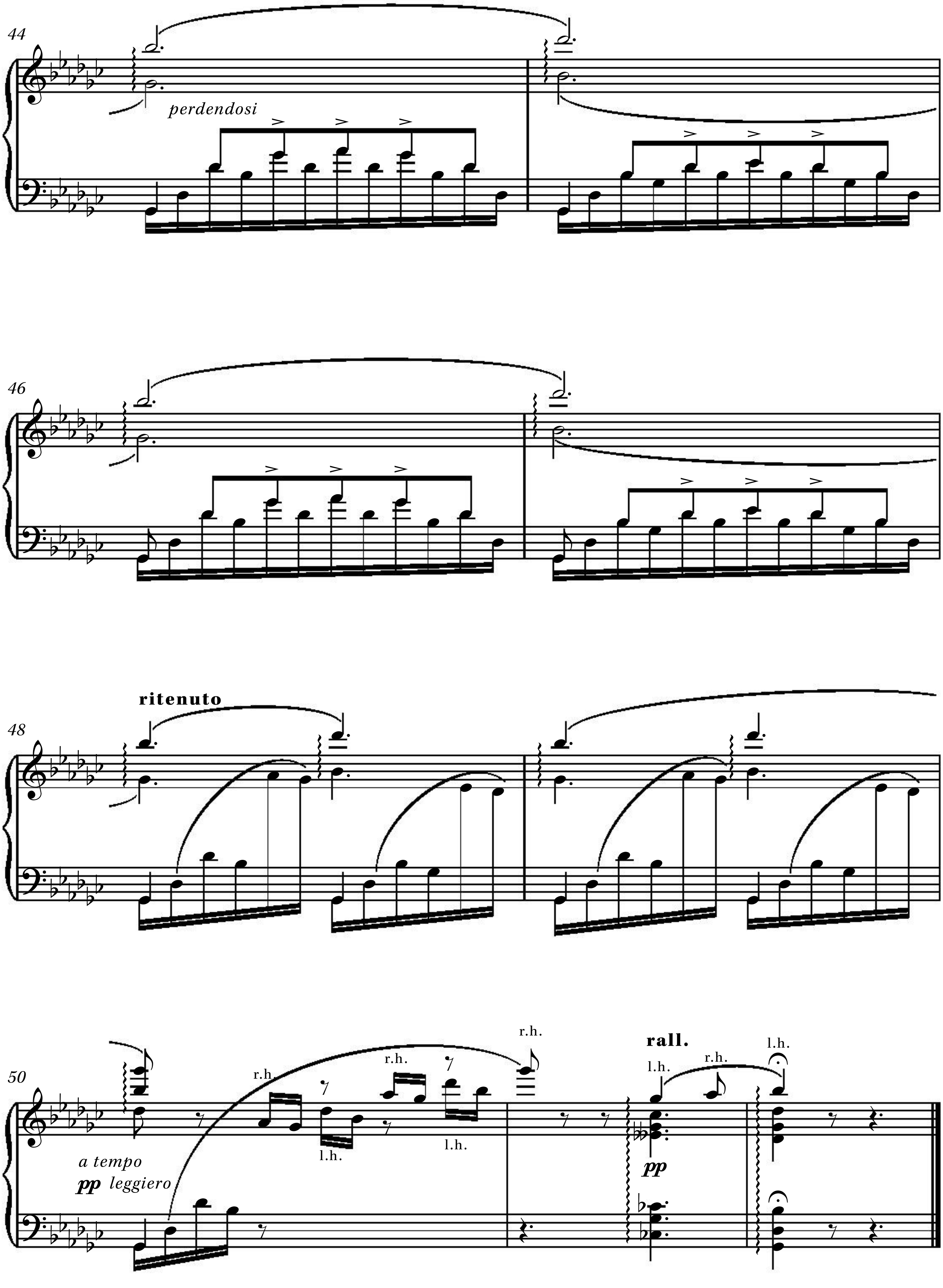
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rall.
l.h.
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l.h.
pp

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Nikki Iles

Blue Lagoon

From *Piano Tales for Peter Pan*

BY ANDREW EALES

Nikki Iles will be well known to *International Piano* readers as a doyenne of the UK jazz scene, equally respected as a pianist, band leader, composer and educator. Her piano collections published by OUP and ABRSM have established themselves as popular best-sellers, and her arrangements frequently appear in exam syllabuses.

Piano Tales for Peter Pan is the sequel to her 2018 collection *Piano Tales for Alice*; both are available from specialist publisher EVC Music. *Piano Tales for Alice* includes 16 pieces inspired by the beloved novels of Lewis Carroll, suitable for players between Grades 1 and 3. *Piano Tales for Peter Pan* presents a further 11 pieces for intermediate players (Grades 3-5), this time based on the JM Barrie classic. Both collections deliver the delicious mix of wit, imagination and jazz-tinged brilliance that has made Nikki's music so popular with players and teachers around the world.

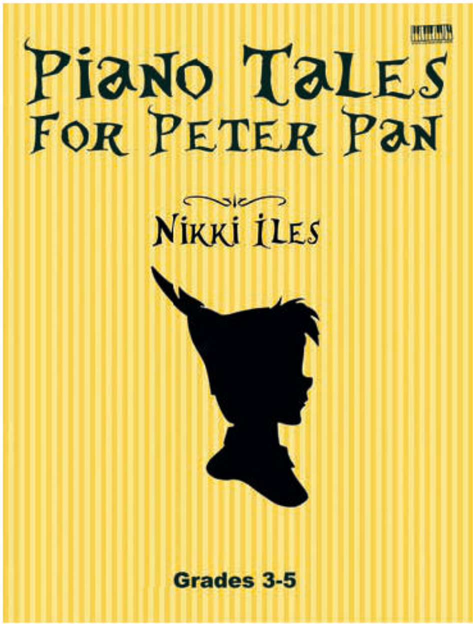
In JM Barrie's story, Peter Pan memorably takes Wendy to meet the mermaids who live in the *Blue Lagoon*, a tranquil setting on the magical island of Neverland. We learn that Peter often visits to entertain these mystical characters with his adventure stories, and that they in turn are infatuated with him. Nikki Iles depicts this warm scene in the evocative and gently lilting piece presented here.

A subtle, swaying Caribbean rhythm at first underpins the steady harmonic movement, which undulates between evocative major sixth and ninth chords. The player will need to take care with the timing; though seemingly loose in nature, an effective performance depends on holding notes for their full length, ensuring that the first beat of the bar lands with confident consistency. Keep the wrists supple, and bring clarity to the shifting chords by following the composer's carefully notated pedalling marks to the letter.

Tone control and voicing are important throughout. Ensure that the carefree melody introduced in bar 5 has prominence; when the tune further takes flight in bar 13, emphasise the syncopation and firmer harmonic movement with gentle accentuation. Finally, at its conclusion the piece fades into bliss.

Suitable for players at around Grade 3 level, *Blue Lagoon* offers a perfect starting point for delving into the rest of the *Piano Tales for Peter Pan* collection, which includes pieces that imaginatively conjure the other colourful personalities of Neverland, from the Lost Boys to the infamous pirates, and from fairy Tink to Tic-Toc the Croc. **IP**

This title is available from ***www.musicroom.com***

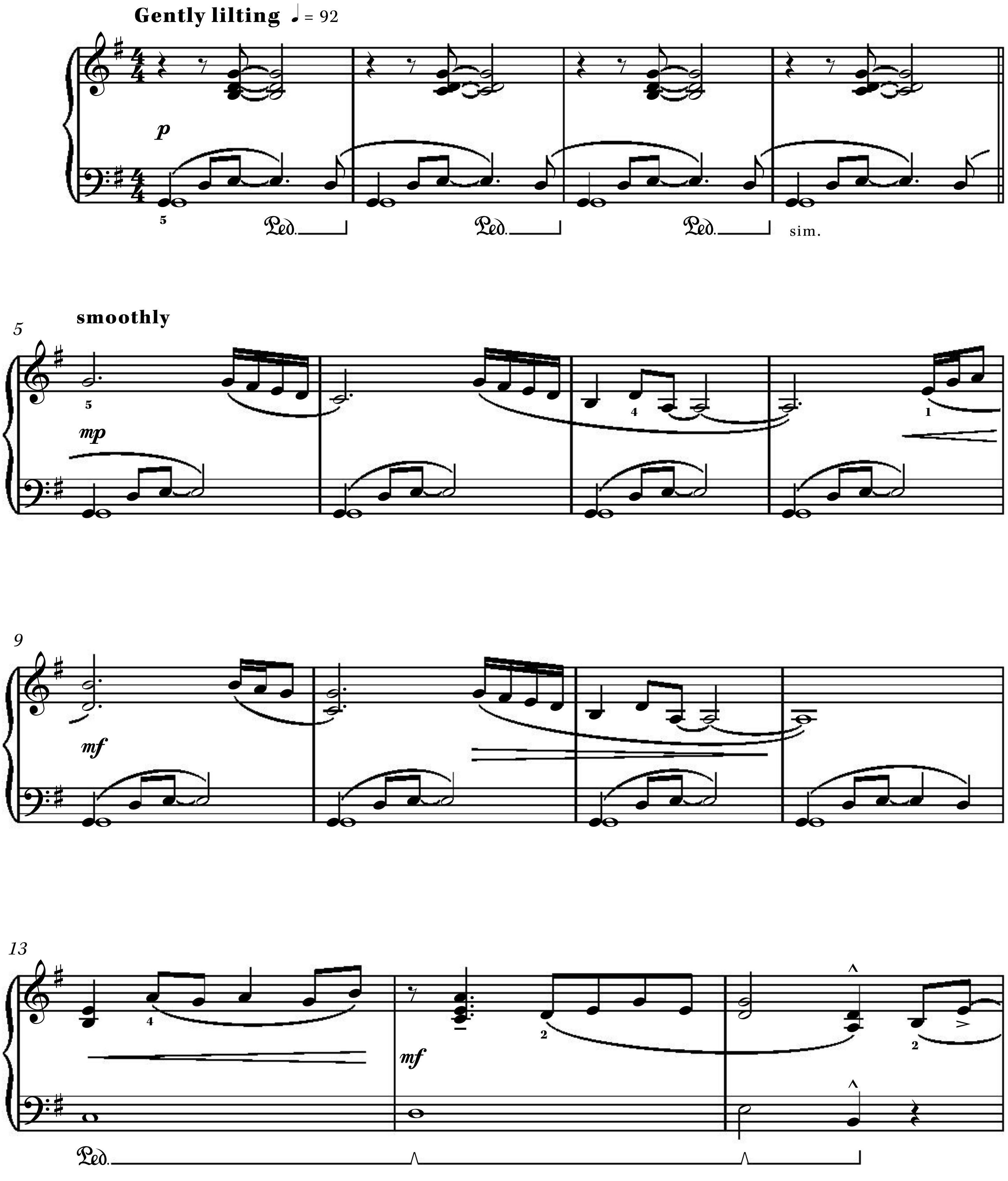


Nikki Iles

Blue Lagoon

From Piano Tales for Peter Pan

Nikki Iles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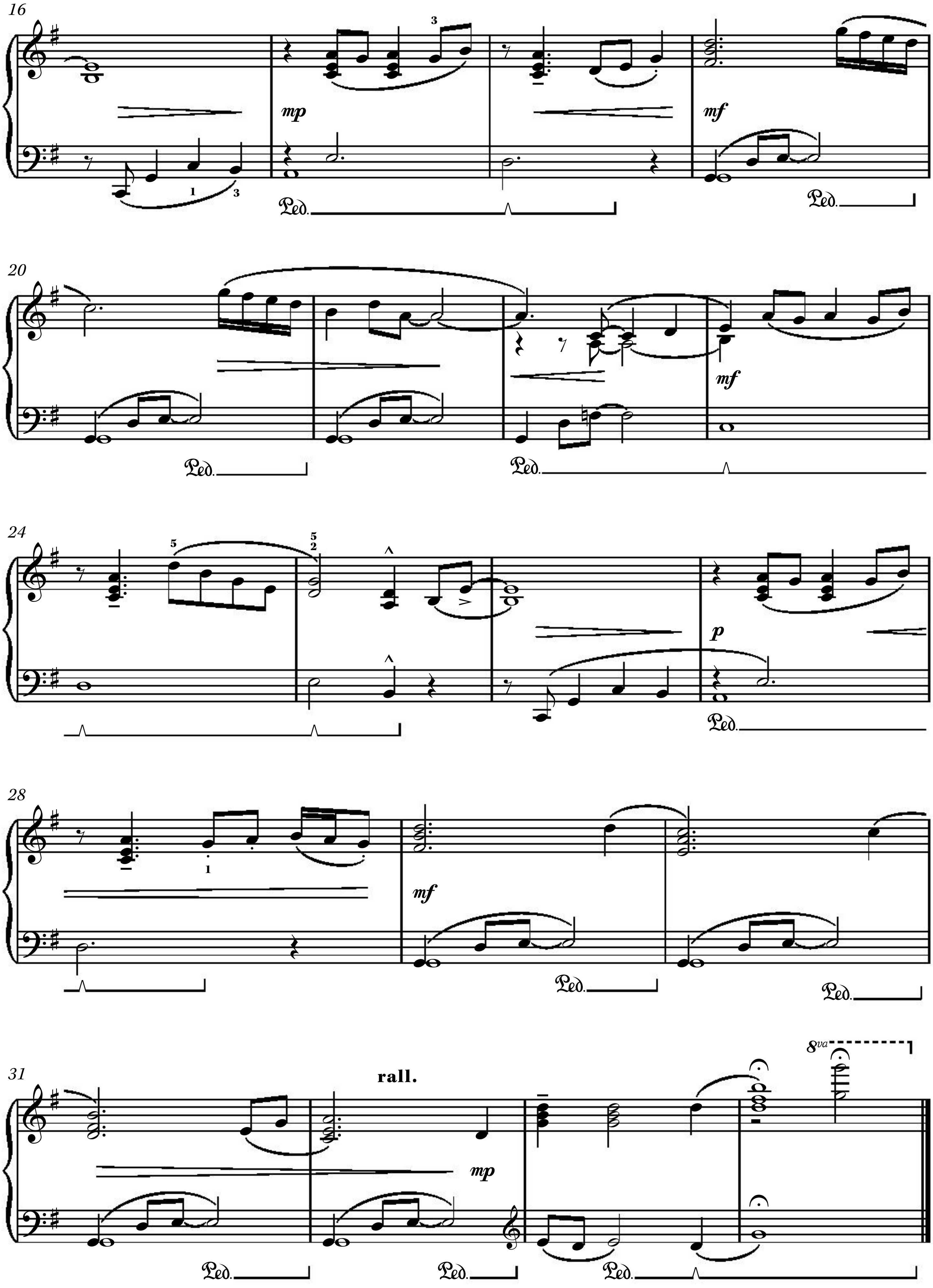
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Xaver Scharwenka (1850-1924)

Nine Symphonies, Four Hands, One Piano

Tessa Uys and Ben Schoeman are recording Beethoven's complete symphonies in the little-known piano-duet arrangements by Xaver Scharwenka. **Jeremy Nicholas** talks to them about this adventurous project

Helga Bassel was a well-known German concert pianist in the inter-war years. In 1935, for the all-too-familiar reasons, she was expelled from the Reichsmusikkammer by the Nazis. That meant she was no longer allowed to perform in public. Warned that worse was to come, the following year, like so many others of Jewish descent, Helga fled the country. She made for South Africa, somehow managing to take her beloved Blüthner grand piano with her along with all her music scores. Little did she know what a valuable legacy that would be.

Sadly, in 1969 Helga committed suicide. The piano and scores passed to her child prodigy daughter Tessa Uys. In 2004, the Blüthner was taken from the family home in Cape Town to the Blüthner factory in Leipzig to be restored. Today it is an exhibit in Berlin's Jewish Museum. The music library came with Tessa to London where she has lived for many years.

It was Tessa who began the next bit of the story while her duet partner Ben Schoeman joined the conversation from Pretoria. 'It was the music director of a festival in the City [of London] at St Lawrence Jewry, Graham Allan, who called me in distress approximately two weeks before the opening saying that the man who was coming from Europe to play Liszt's transcription of Beethoven's Ninth had pulled out. He asked me if by any chance I had it in my repertoire. I said no. He said do you know anybody who does? I said no but I do have at the back of my mind an idea.' She asked him to give her ten minutes while she went to look in her music room. On the shelves was the huge collection of two-piano music that had belonged to her mother. Within minutes she found the score of the Ninth, along with volumes containing the other eight symphonies, arranged for piano duet by Xaver Scharwenka.

She rang Allan back and told him she might be able to help with this. Who did she have in mind as her partner? Ben Schoeman. 'I rang Ben. He immediately said yes. He was on his way to play a recital in Lake Como. He came to London. We had four days to prepare it. We worked day and night at it – in a heat wave! The first time we played it through from cover to cover was the evening of the concert. Since then, we have played all nine Scharwenka arrangements of the symphonies.'

And how did Helga Uys (née Bassel) come to have these rare scores, the existence of which many readers will be unaware? Helga Bassel studied at the Berliner Hochschule für Musik with Leonid Kreutzer (1884-1953), who himself was a pupil of Anna Essipova (sometimes transliterated as Yesipova – the second of Leschetizky's four wives). Kreutzer was a gifted and influential teacher, and knew Scharwenka well.

So far as I know, there has only ever been one recording of any of the Beethoven-Scharwenka symphonies, and that was in 2013 when the Fifth Symphony appeared on the MDG label with Beethoven's own piano-duet arrangement of the *Grosse Fuge* played by Evelinde Trenkner and Sontraud Speidel. There are, of course, other duet arrangements of the nine symphonies – by Hugo Ulrich, Otto Singer, Stefan Stocker, Richard Kleinmichel and other in-house arrangers – as well as those for solo piano, most famously by Liszt. Not so well known is the fact that having completed his versions of the other eight, Liszt struggled to arrange the Ninth as a solo piano work and tried to convince Breitkopf that it couldn't be done. 'But', Schoeman tells me, 'his publisher told him that none of the others would be published if he did not do the Ninth. He did so and later, as you know, arranged it for two pianos. So it was quite ironic that it was actually through Liszt's solo arrangement of the *Choral* Symphony that our project came about.'

This project is the recording of all the Beethoven-Scharwenka symphonies by the piano duo for the Somm label. Volume 1 has the *Eroica* (with Debussy's arrangement of Schumann's *Canonic Studies*); volume 2 has Symphony No 5 (with Saint-Saëns's *Variations on a Theme of Beethoven* and Schumann's *Andante and Variations*, Op 46). The reviews – including those from the present writer – have been ecstatic. The third volume, with Symphonies Nos 2 and 7, has just been issued.

Xaver Scharwenka's music has largely been forgotten, notwithstanding the once phenomenal popularity of his *Polish Dance*, Op 3 No 1 (among the numbers that he himself recorded). All four of his piano concertos have been recorded, most memorably No 1 in B flat minor, revived by Earl Wild, a grand-pupil of the composer, for an RCA recording first issued in 1969. What does Ben Schoeman think Scharwenka brings to the scores that the other duet arrangers do not? 'Well, I studied all of Scharwenka's music in Seta Tanyel's recordings, and of course there are the four concertos (all on Hyperion). They are very innovative pianistic works. They show a wonderful conglomeration of almost all available media that Scharwenka knew about and performed. I've read many reviews of his playing, praising him for his stylistic clarity and virtuosity. I think that is encapsulated in these transcriptions because he is obviously very motivated to bring justice to Beethoven's originals. It's a pity that there is not more Beethoven for piano duet. There's the Sonata in D, Op 6, that is rarely played but it's a shame that there is not a large corpus of material by Beethoven for this medium. Scharwenka's take is close to how you feel Beethoven would have arranged his symphonies. There are none of Liszt's flourishes or florid, arpeggiated concepts. These you would never find in Scharwenka. That's why the four-hand medium is better. It simply allows more layers of texture to come through. That doesn't make it easier! He certainly challenges the players in terms of pedalling choices, fingerings that would avoid clashes and the adjustment of the hands and seating positions, as well as articulation choices in terms of clarity, and to enhance colouristic variety. There are so many aspects that keep us completely on our toes.'

An orchestra in four hands: Ben Schoeman and Tessa Uys

I ask Tessa: which has been the most difficult of the nine symphonies to get into her fingers? 'I personally found the Second Symphony the most challenging, probably and primarily because of the extremely difficult last movement. It's like Scarlatti on steroids! The second subject offers momentary relief but otherwise it's non-stop. Very demanding. Of course, the biggest symphonies – the Seventh with that crazy last movement is demanding technically, and the Ninth requires so much stamina …' 'What also exacerbates the difficulty of the Second,' Ben interjects, 'is that it's still a relatively Classical work. One might compare it with some of the early sonatas which are often harder on a virtuosic level to play than the contemplative later works. I also find the First Symphony difficult in this regard. But the Seventh Symphony has some overtly non-pianistic components. The rapid repetition of chords, for example. It's very orchestral.'

Uys and Schoeman have been playing together since 2010. 'In South Africa, where I grew up,' Ben tells me, 'Tessa is a legend of the keyboard. I often heard her on the radio, long before I met her. I studied in Italy before moving to London where I studied with her, especially Schumann's music. For me, that was a very wonderful privilege to go to Tessa's house and be mentored by her, to learn the repertoire, to discuss the music with her as a friend on such a regular basis. So it was a natural extension of that process that led us to play two piano and piano four hands.'

The two met at a summer party at the Royal Over-Seas League in St James's (London). 'I was living in London at the time,' says Uys, 'and was delighted to meet this dashing young prince of the keyboard, as he'd recently been awarded first prize in the UNISA International Piano Competition in Pretoria, and had arrived in the UK on a Royal Over-Seas scholarship. We immediately bonded over music and because of my childhood in South Africa. Shortly afterwards, the League invited us to give a recital together.'

The Beethoven-Scharwenka symphonies are a valuable addition to the repertoire of the 21st-century duettist. 'Our aim,' admits Schoeman, 'is to play all nine in one week, because we want to convey the exciting trajectory through these works, and also the pianistic experience.' 'Siva Oke [producer and owner of Somm] has been a wonderful guide and given us so such encouragement throughout this journey, says Uys. 'We are hoping that she will put out our Ninth next year.'

There seems more than a strong possibility that this might happen. Next year is the 200th anniversary of the composition of the Ninth Symphony. It is also the centenary of Scharwenka's death. **IP**

See our review of Volume 3 of this Beethoven/Scharwenka cycle on page 59

In full swing

Chiyan Wong celebrates the influence of jazz on classical music with his new album of works by Ravel and Tsfasman. **Owen Mortimer** reports

Chiyan Wong: 'If you make something beautiful people can't help but fall into it'

KIMIO NG

'Ravel and Tsfasman both lived at a time when war was close, and now we are there again,' says Chiyan Wong. 'This is hard, but should spur us to celebrate what is beautiful and ephemeral.'

Wong's new album 'Swing!' brings together two masterworks for piano and orchestra that fizz with exuberance tinged with melancholy: Ravel's celebrated Concerto in G major and the lesser-known *Jazz Suite* by Soviet pianist-composer Alexander Tsfasman (1906-71). Both scores date from the heyday of America's swing era and incorporate jazz elements such as syncopation and extended harmonies, colourfully orchestrated with plenty of percussion. In each case, the freewheeling, improvisatory feel of the solo writing belies fiendish technical challenges.

When Ravel's Concerto was premiered in Philadelphia in 1932, the US was nearing the height of the Great Depression with unemployment riding at 24 per cent and GDP down nearly a third against 1929. In their hustle and bustle, the outer movements are full of energy and playful effects but the heart of the work is its lyrical *Adagio*. Yet even this music never becomes a dirge, reflecting Ravel's stated aim of writing a piece that is both 'gay and brilliant without necessarily being profound or aiming at dramatic effects'.

Wong says he has striven to perform the concerto with a 'Ravel-like ear for colour' while avoiding the exhibitionism often associated with keyboard virtuosity. 'Historically there has been a lot of "swooning" in the way Ravel's concerto is performed,' he suggests. 'With my recording I've sought to wash away all the unnecessary drama and domestic fights that don't really exist in the piece. It's sleek, like a pristine Cadillac rolled straight out of the factory – that's the feeling I want.'

It perhaps comes as no surprise to discover Wong's favourite Ravel interpreter of yesteryear is Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli, who enjoyed a reputation for perfectionism and objectivity. 'Before I performed the Ravel for the first time I listened to every available pirate recording of Michelangeli playing this concerto and was struck by his ingenuity,' says Wong. 'When analysed forensically, there's so much going on within his so-called "perfectionism". For example, in the first-movement cadenza (at fig 26 in the Durand edition), Michelangeli finds a way to connect the notes of Ravel's melody and evoke the sound of a theremin. Is this being true to what Ravel wrote? Someone like Alfred Brendel would say no, but I believe it's true to the composer's imagination.'

Wong continues: 'Ravel is known to have said, "Art is a beautiful lie." That's why it's so ideal. If you make something beautiful people can't help but fall into it. Ultimately, it's about craftsmanship and taking care over every detail.'

Wong points to some unusual technical aspects of Michelangeli's playing, revealing how the Italian master achieved his crystalline sound: 'In the repeated notes of the finale, the

C. BECHSTEIN

COURTESY OF PLATOON

Wong recording his latest album with the LSO and conductor Christoph Koncz

easiest thing would be to play with fingers 3-2-1, 3-2-1, 3-2-1, etc. Yet Michelangeli finds a way to play 1-3-2, 1-3-2, 1-3-2. That's what makes his beats so clear.'

Another of Wong's 'keyboard saints' is the Russian pianist Mikhail Pletnev: 'When I was 12 years old, hearing him play felt like someone wrenching my soul out of my body.' Wong has wanted to learn Tsfasman's *Jazz Suite* ever since hearing Pletnev perform it at the 2013 Verbier Festival. 'I thought it was such an incredible piece so had to find the music,' he explains. 'When I started to learn it I was fascinated to find how well it fits under the fingers. It made me realise jazz pianists take a very Lisztian approach to the keyboard. It's also very Horowitzian, which is perhaps less surprising when you consider that Horowitz and Tsfasman were both students of Felix Blumenfeld.'

Tsfasman's score dates from 1945, when the Soviet Union was emerging from the carnage of the Second World War. Victory against Germany had come at the cost of over 20 million military and civilian deaths, so the suite's light-hearted character is surprising unless viewed as an exercise in escapism. A similar criticism was levelled against Shostakovich's Ninth Symphony, performed later the same year, with one American reviewer writing that 'the Russian composer should not have expressed his feelings about the defeat of Nazism in such a childish manner.'

Tsfasman's *Jazz Suite* is cast in four foot-tapping movements. The opening *Allegro vivace* ('Snowflakes') gets off to a cartoonish start with drunken chromatic woodwinds, promptly followed by the piano entry: sparkling cascades in the right hand underpinned by off-beat chords in the bass. A nicely contrasted middle section features swooning strings against a rich Rachmaninov-meets-Gershwin chordal melody in the piano. Next comes a 'Lyrical Waltz' in E minor, which bears more than a passing resemblance to the Waltz in Shostakovich's *Jazz Suite* No 2 from 1938. The main theme of Tfsasman's third-movement 'Polka' is wonderfully impish, again nicely contrasted with a more lyrical middle section, while the finale 'Career' (*Presto*) rattles along with gleeful virtuosity, only giving the pianist brief respite from playing frantic scales to lead a flowing melodic interlude.

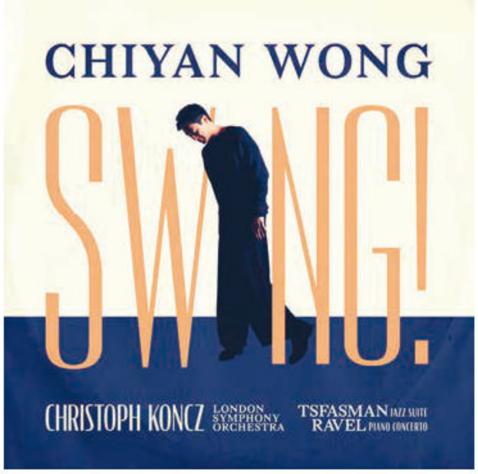
In his booklet note for the album, Daniel Jaffé suggests that Tsfasman was spared the official censure and punishment meted out to other jazz musicians under Stalinism because he didn't travel abroad until he was 60. This meant his deep understanding of jazz was gleaned primarily from recordings and scores, whereas Ravel had visited America and met Gershwin in 1928. 'You could say that Tsfasman was imagining an ideal of how American music sounded,' says Wong. 'It's exactly like the piece I'm preparing next: Busoni's *Indian Fantasy*. He had been to America and met Native Americans yet is writing music that sounds Chinese or even Greek because it's pentatonic. Native Americans would probably say, "What on earth is this? It's not our music." Yet there are folk tunes littered throughout the score. It's Busoni imagining America and I love that.'

Wong says he is drawn to music that explores different cultural identities because of his heritage: 'Coming from Hong Kong I identify with this because Chinese people regard you as a Westerner, while Westerners think you're Chinese! So as pianist and composer I'm always interested in ways of inhabiting different facets of yourself. In fact, they're *all* you. That's why I resonate with this music and am so sympathetic to it.'

An insightful observation by the British composer Thomas Adès provides another key to Wong's artistry. 'We met during a workshop at the International Musicians Seminar in Cornwall and he said something that has really stuck with me,' recalls Wong. 'After I played he asked if I know how a magician uses their cloak. Yes, I replied, because my father is a professional magician! Adès told me: "The piano for you is like a smokescreen – you're trying to create obscure effects that bend people's beliefs and expectations."'

Wong says that 'after playing the Tsfasman I play Mozart differently'. He is particularly fascinated by the syncopated rhythms of jazz: 'The emphasis on irregular beats means you're always moving ahead. In fact, my favourite composers – Mozart, Liszt, Ravel, Busoni – all tend to occupy ground that's shifting. They're on the cusp of something, playing with the outer regions of what we expect. This for me is truly contemporary.' **IP**

Chiyan Wong's 'Swing!' features Ravel's Piano Concerto in G major and Tsfasman's 'Jazz Suite' with the London Symphony Orchestra under Christoph Koncz (Platoon PLAT18171). It will be reviewed in the next issue of International Piano ***chiyanwong.com***



Critic's choice

BY BRYCE MORRISON

1
harmonia mundi
VARIATION[S]
Beethoven
Mozart | Schumann | Webern
Cédric Tiberghien

Beethoven Complete Variations for Piano, Volume 1
Also includes works by Mozart, Schumann and Webern
Cédric Tiberghien *pf*
Harmonia Mundi HMM90 2433/4

Volume 1 of Beethoven's complete variations for piano is complemented by Mozart, Schumann (his *Variations on a Theme by Beethoven*, a rare and special offering) of such musical quality that it makes you eager for Volume 2, with the daunting 'Diabelli' Variations at its heart. How fascinating to compare Tiberghien's often piquant and mischievous characterisation of the 'Eroica' Variations with Gigashvili's more robust and assertive account (see below). Elegant, but never as a limitation, Tiberghien admirably credits Beethoven with delicacy a well as roughness. I doubt whether many will feel the same way about these variations after hearing him conjure their alternating exuberance and reflection with charm and brilliance, yet without excessive pleading or idiosyncrasy (Glenn Gould comes to mind).

Such special qualities make Tiberghien an engaging master of Beethoven's briefer, less familiar variations, where his luminous pianism lights up one aspect after another. This is never more the case than when Beethoven so reassuringly enjoys a joke just as much as the next man in those variations alive with wit and good humour. Tiberghien's Mozart is sufficiently subtle to make you long to hear him in the piano concertos, while his Schumann makes you wonder why music so quintessential is so unreasonably neglected. Whether in Schumann's 'Beethoven' Variations or in the tragic finality of the 'Ghost' Variations – for Tieberghien music of a 'tortured and radiant soul' – the playing is of a consummate skill. 'When I play the piano, I give everything inside me,' Tiberghien has said, and this album offers ample evidence of such fervour and commitment.

Cédric Tiberghien

BIS
romeo and juliet
TCHAIKOVSKY ON THE PIANO
YEVGENY SUDBIN
BELLA SUDBIN

'Romeo and Juliet – Tchaikovsky on the Piano'
Yevgeny Sudbin, Bella Sudbin *pf*
BIS BIS2198 (SACD)

After a sizeable absence from the studios Yevgeny Sudbin returns in a response to Tchaikovsky both virtuosic and joyous. His recital focuses principally on transcriptions, a once despised Romantic tradition beloved by pianists such as Jorge Bolet and Earl Wild. These are imaginatively interspersed with examples from *The Seasons* and most notably the *Dumka*, with its alternating deep-dyed all-Russian melancholy and shafts of light. Sudbin's own scintillating transcription of Glinka's *Ruslan and Ludmila* is added for good measure and rarely has he sounded so at ease with himself, delighting in every emotional

Communicating joy: Martha Argerich

ALBUM OF THE MONTH

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BEETHOVEN
MARTHA ARGERICH
ISRAEL PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA
LAHAV SHANI

Beethoven Piano Concerto No 2 in B flat major, Op 19
Ravel Piano Concerto in G major
Martha Argerich *pf*
Israel Philharmonic Orchestra / Lahav Shani
Avanti AVA10662

Selecting an Album of the Month for this issue, I have rarely been confronted by a more subjective decision. All of the other recordings in this 'Critic's Choice' selection are by prize-winning pianists and all must have prizes. And yet, once again, and to a greater extent than ever, Martha Argerich has recreated her small, oft-repeated repertoire in such a way that she seems to be performing both the Beethoven and Ravel concertos (most particularly the Ravel) with all of her first love. It is surely among the most singular of her extraordinary gifts that she is happy to repeat, maintain and refresh those works most dear to her heart with a fantasy, richness and allure known to no other pianist. And here, alongside the Israel Philharmonic and their music director Lahav and physical aspect. If Tchaikovsky, who had a low opinion of his solo piano works, had heard these performances he could well have changed his mind. Here, lovingly presented, accompanied by the pianist's delightfully informal and informed notes, is a richly varied communication, ending in a blaze of glory in, again, Sudbin's own transcription of Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet* Fantasy Overture. In two waltz transcriptions (from *The Nutcracker* and *The Sleeping Beauty*) Sudbin is joined wonderfully by his 12-year-old daughter Bella. BIS's sound is as vivid and immediate as the playing.

PIANO STORIES
GIORGI GIGASHVILI
MEETING MY SHADOW

'Meeting My Shadow'
Works by Beethoven, Brahms, Messiaen, D Scarlatti and Scriabin
Giorgi Gigashvili *pf*
Alpha ALPHA930

The 22-year-old Georgian pianist Giorgi Gigashvili is a protégé of Martha Argerich and Nelson Goerner and, quoting George Eliot ('all meanings, we know, depend on the key of interpretation'), he dedicates his enigmatically titled programme to what he sees as a composer's notion of love (surely perverse in the case of Scriabin's Sonata No 9, the 'Black Mass'). His way with Beethoven's 'Eroica' Variations is tirelessly exuberant, with a special love of the composer's rough-hewn humour. Yet he is equally sensitive in the oasis of calm of Variations 15 and 16, where there is no lack of poise or inwardness. Elsewhere, he relishes the Spanish character of Scarlatti's C major Sonata, Kk487, while he is rapt and confiding in Brahms's Op 117 Intermezzos, alternately devotional and storming in Messiaen's 'Le baiser de l'Enfant-Jésus' (from *Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus*), and – ever versatile – revels in Scriabin, whether in the A flat Waltz's hallucinatory flight or in the demonic Ninth Sonata. Argerich and Goener's belief in Gigashvili's gifts could hardly be more impressively confirmed.

harmonia mundi
7 COMPOSERS
FANTASIE
7 KEYBOARDS
ALEXANDER MELNIKOV

'Fantasie – Seven Composers, Seven Keyboards'
Works by CPE Bach, JS Bach, Busoni, Chopin, Mendelssohn, Mozart and Schnittke
Alexander Melnikov *hpd/fps/pfs*
Harmonia Mundi HMM90 2702

Alexander Melnikov sets the stage for his programme with a quote from Einstein: 'the separation between past, present and future is only an illusion, if a stubborn one'. This is illustrated no less aptly by what he calls 'a handshake game of sorts'. With different historic instruments – for him, 'time machines' – he sees a common denominator in JS Bach's 'Chromatic' Fantasia and Fugue, its drama and improvisatory daring underlined by the glitter of the harpsichord. In CPE Bach's wildly eccentric F sharp minor Fantasia he makes it clear why such writing has become a magnet for virtuosos including Hamelin, Pletnev and Trifonov, and he is no less masterly in Busoni's severely cerebral Fantasia. He has all the stylistic freedom and engagement to make an assured case for Mendelssohn's 'Scottish' Fantasia, the composer's finest keyboard work with its treacherously demanding finale, and if his Chopin Fantasy gets off to an oddly indifferent start it rises to a technical prowess that reminds you that Melnikov's previous recordings of Rachmaninov, Prokofiev and Shostakovich are the work of a front-rank pianist. However, he leaves his greatest triumph to the end, with Schnittke's *Improvisation and Fugue* thrown off with formidable authority. This is a thought-provoking and enlightening album.

ISMAËL MARGAIN
IMPROMPTUS
FAURÉ
CHOPIN
NAIVE

Chopin Impromptus; Berceuse; Étude, Op 25 No 2
Fauré Six Impromptus; Improvisation No 5, Op 84 No 5
Margain Improvisation
Ismaël Margain *pf*
Naive V7860

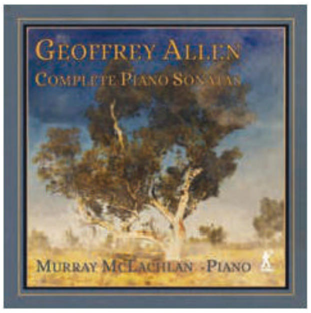
Interweaving Fauré and Chopin, Ismaël Margain makes a necessarily bold and enterprising gesture. As he puts it, 'let us enjoy both the singularity of these two geniuses and everything that unites them'. Fauré is rarely granted such elevation (notably in France), often dismissed on two fronts, first as a salon figure (for Debussy 'a master of charms'), second as a master of obscurity. So it is greatly to Margain's credit that his performances – fresh, direct and unsentimental in the best French tradition – validate his challenge. His is a radically different approach to, say Germaine Thyssens-Valentin, whose haunting survey ranges far from received French tradition. Yet he is memorable in his chase through the breathless rise and fall of the First Impromptu, capturing all of Fauré's early intricate and erotic elaboration, and he is no less attuned to the darker and elliptical utterances of the Fourth and Fifth Impromptus.

Fauré would surely have delighted in a letting in of the daylight in the Third Impromptu (he complained that people would insist on playing him 'with the shutters down'). In Chopin, too, Margain erases all notion of posturing or self-conscious rhetoric, whether in the Berceuse's embroidery or in the Second Impromptu's archaic storytelling. For encores he gives us Fauré's delectable Improvisation in C sharp minor from his Op 84, followed by, and taking his cue from Fauré, his own Improvisation. **IP**

Shani (himself a notable pianist as well a conductor: he does a mean Prokofiev Third), she has surely found a dream partnership. Argerich and Shani are as ideally partnered as Fonteyn and Nureyev.

Argerich's Beethoven is hardly less overwhelming than her Ravel, happily free from all studio confines, and never more so than in the outsize first-movement cadenza and in her mischievously inflected close to the same movement. Argerich's virtuosity remains a phenomenon and a mystery, most of all to herself. She may claim she loves to play the piano but dislikes being a pianist (avaricious managers, lonely hotel rooms, incessant travel) but here, as much as on any occasion, she communicates boundless joy in music-making.

SOLO REPERTOIRE



Geoffrey Allen Complete Piano Sonatas
Murray McLachlan *pf*
Métier MSV77502 (5 CDs)

Born in Essex, Geoffrey Allen (1927-2021) emigrated to Australia in 1952, after studying chemistry and geography at Oxford, working mostly in Western Australia as a librarian. For many, his primary contribution to Australian musical life was as a publisher and recording administrator, making accessible works by many Australian and Australian-resident composers from Edgar Bainton and Margaret Sutherland to Miriam Hyde and Larry Sitsky.

Allen started composing while still in England and – private piano lessons aside – was self-taught as a composer. His piano sonatas will likely prove his most significant legacy and were largely the product of his retirement. Although Murray McLachlan suggests that he is the pianist's Havergal Brian (see the feature on pages 34-36 of the current issue), mainly because he wrote so much of his music in his advanced years, there is no stylistic or expressive common ground between these composers. A more telling analogy might be with another self-taught Essex-born composer of piano sonatas, Harold Truscott (1914-92), although Allen's musical and harmonic language was fundamentally different to Truscott's, his expressive concerns differently and more narrowly focused.

What, then, does Allen's music sound like? In his own words he felt his music was 'mainly influenced by the English composers I grew up with – Delius, Walton, Ireland, Vaughan Williams, etc – and also by French music from Debussy on'. He acknowledged many other influences, too, and his music feels international in tone, upon an English base. The music is tonally based, although fairly freely, certainly not the height of fashion in 1989 when he started work on Sonata No 2, *Sonata espanola*. The First, commenced but abandoned in 1959, was not resumed until 1995; No 3 was begun straight afterwards and finished in 1996. These three works set the tone for what followed, the style – which did not develop greatly (although the expressive language certainly deepened) – lyrical rather than especially dramatic, not unlike some of Truscott's early sonatas, but less polyphonically driven. The strengths and limitations of Allen's style loom large in the *Sonata espanola*, which for much of its length will not strike many as sounding particularly Spanish. Yet its composition – following a visit to Spain in 1989 – was the vital moment in his career, providing the spur not just to this sonata, completed in 1990, but for the completion of No 1 and the 15 that followed. The French influence is heard overtly at the start of the Ninth's opening *Commodo*, although it broadens out fairly quickly, while both No 7 (2000) and No 12 (2006) bear finales with a Bartókian rhythmic drive.

The Ninth (2002) is one of many that arose from purely musical considerations (or with no declared programme); the neo-Romantic Twelfth (2006) is another. Nos 6 (1999-2000) and 10 (2003), however, were responses to political events outside Australia, whether the twin atrocities in Kosovo and East Timor or the Second Gulf War. The Tenth encapsulated his mood, 'somewhere between anger and despair', especially in the magnificent final *Grave*, one of his finest utterances.

There is no denying Murray McLachlan's winning advocacy, each sonata persuasively presented with commendable limpidity, alive to the many nuances of Allen's unorthodox, not unchallenging pianistic manner. Métier's recordings are beautifully clear, providing the music with the finest possible platform, and I hope it is taken up by others. If the set lacks anything, it is a single standout work to ignite that interest, but there are no weak pieces here: consistency is one of Allen's strong suits.

GUY RICKARDS

Margherita
Torretta
Colours of Venice
Baldassare Galuppi

'Colours of Venice'
Galuppi Six Sonatas
Margherita Torretta *pf*
Academy Productions AP4151

The high ground of Baldassare Galuppi's life (1706-85) was spent in Venice but with influential spells in London and at the court of Catherine the Great in St Petersburg. From 1748 he was associated with St Mark's, appointed *maestro di cappella* in 1762. Copiously active in opera up to the early 1770s, with Goldoni and Metastasio among his librettists, he was regarded by Burney to have 'had more influence on English music than any other Italian composer' of his day.

A renowned keyboard player – remembered by contemporaries for his 'special style and fiery accuracy' – he left over 130 sonatas, two sets of which were printed in London in the late 1750s. Michelangeli effectively put him on the pianistic map with his 1948 London recording of the *Presto* from the B flat Sonata, I:32, and then his 1962 Turin account of the C major, I:27. Including both works on this new album, London-based Margherita Torretta persuades that Galuppi on the piano (rather than the harpsichord) can sound remarkably forward, looking to Mozart, even Beethoven, Schubert too. Adding dynamics (sporadic in surviving manuscripts if plentiful enough in the Benvenuti 1920 non-Urtext she uses for I:9, 12, 27 and 34), along with some modest re-texturing and pedalling, she makes the most of what she calls 'dramatic disturbances of an existential nature'. Her dreaming 'aria' movements balance cantilena, ornament and improvisation with artistic elegance. And her subtle left-hand rubato relieves Alberti basses of mechanistic drill routine. Arguably the studio balance is a touch close and hard – her online videos reveal a more refined *dolcissimo* – but one adjusts.

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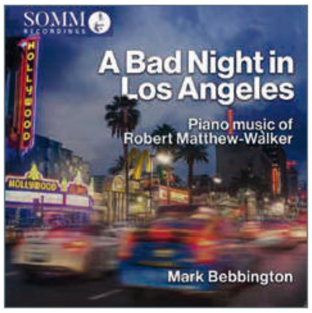

SOMM Recordings
A Bad Night in Los Angeles
Piano music of Robert Matthew-Walker
Mark Bebbington
Hollywood

'A Bad Night in Los Angeles'
Piano works by **Robert Matthew-Walker**
Mark Bebbington, Rebeca Omordia *pf*
Somm SOMMCD0662

The musical career of Robert Matthew-Walker (*b*1939) is extraordinarily varied.

Record producer, label founder and administrator, author of books whose subjects range from Artyomov and Havergal Brian to David Bowie and Elvis, editor of *Musical Opinion* and composer of over 200 works. Mark Bebbington's latest album collects the majority of his piano output – omitting the first two sonatas (the second is withdrawn) – the fruit of his many years playing them in recitals. London-based readers may have heard several in his series 'Notes from a Small Island' at St John's Smith Square in 2021-22.

Matthew-Walker may concede that he is 'not much of a pianist', although the opening diptych for the left hand, *Nocturne and Aubade* (2015), shows how well he knows the instrument: the first movement is a glacially still 'Reflection at Midnight' – with not a breath of wind to disturb the image – while the second is a brilliant, brief 'Toccata on three notes', written to a challenge from Hans Keller. The shorter works all display his whimsical, humorous side, not least the *Divertimento on a Theme of Mozart* for piano duet (1984) – with Bebbington joined by the excellent Rebeca Omordia – and *Fantasy on a Theme from Malcolm Arnold*, written to celebrate Arnold's centenary in 2021. Matthew-Walker's knack for miniature tone characterisation is highlighted by *Battledore*, a suite of tiny sketches for a friend's daughter.

The larger works are the heart of the programme. Written for Rhondda Gillespie, the Fantasy-Sonata *Hamlet* (1980) broils and seethes, working its material obsessively until a heart-stoppingly lyrical finale. The *Three American Pictures* (2016-21) were composed for Bebbington, the finale providing the album's title track, which discos its way exhilaratingly around the keyboard. *The Evening of Memory* is an *adagio* in B minor inspired by a phrase of Douglas MacArthur's, slowly bringing together three disparate, conflicting themes (all with the interval of a fourth) to a tranquil resolution. *The Fields are White Already* is Matthew-Walker's memorial to his great friend and contemporary John McCabe (1939-2015), and took six years of consideration: the sublime result closes the programme on a high level of attainment and beauty. Mark Bebbington's performances are definitive, Somm's recording superb. Strongly recommended.

GUY RICKARDS

CHANDOS
MENDELSSOHN
SONGS WITHOUT WORDS, VOLUME 2
Lieder ohne Worte
Peter
Donohoe
piano

Mendelssohn Songs without Words, Volume 2
with other works including Variations sérieuses, Op 54
Peter Dohonoe *pf*
Chandos CHAN20267

Mendelssohn might seem a surprising addition to Peter Donohoe's discography, which until recently has centred on heavy-weight repertoire, much of it from the 20th century. But in his contribution to the booklet notes, the pianist writes of Mendelssohn's influence on his decision to become a musician – and this album, the second of two volumes, celebrates a lifetime of indebtedness. Given this background, it's no surprise that the resulting performances are more deliberate than debonair, more Romantic than Classical: scrupulously detailed and lovingly coloured, they're marked by a tendency to enrich the music's tone, to smooth the articulation and to rein in the tempos.

This stately approach coaxes out the often-forgotten depths of the *Songs without Words*, especially those in minor keys (the moonlight of Op 30 No 6 is especially touching). And the two longer fillers – *Variations sérieuses* and the underrated *Fantasia on 'The last rose of summer'* – have impressive heft and concentration, a particular benefit in the Fantasia, which sounds more substantial, less maudlin, than usual. As an added advantage, if you listen in Donohoe's recommended non-chronological order, the unfamiliar juxtapositions bring added surprises.

That said, the opulence comes at the expense of transparency; and listeners in search of spring – either seasonal or rhythmic – won't find it here. Op 19b No 5, for instance, is rather dour, and the encore, Rachmaninov's transcription of the Scherzo from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, is surprisingly earthbound. Still, for the high points, this collection is worth sampling, especially given Chandos's excellent engineering.

PETER J RABINOWITZ

ARTURO BENEDETTI MICHELANGELI
THE LONDON RECORDINGS VOL 1
THE LOST RECORDINGS

'The London Recordings, Volume 1'
Works by Chopin, Clementi and Ravel
Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli *pf*
The Lost Recordings TLR2203042 (2 CDs)

If you were to ask 'who was Michelangeli?', you could easily find yourself in a critical cul-de-sac, baffled by contradiction. For some he is 'the prince of pianists', and it is true that when the mood took him Michelangeli could leave you lost in wonder at his matchless quality. But he is a pianist who exemplifies an ideology that celebrates an ever-elusive perfection rather than a fluctuating light or imagination. Not for him the constant sense of rediscovery or musical renewal shown by Martha Argerich in, say, Schumann's Concerto. Claiming he played only for himself, remaining coldly indifferent to his audience, he was the reverse of, for example, Rubinstein, whose charismatic relationship with his public was as legendary as Michelangeli's regal autocracy. For Michelangeli, Julius Katchen's claim that the performer's greatest task was to communicate emotion fluently to an audience would be both belittling and absurd.

Readers will, I hope, forgive what is surely a necessary context for approaching this first volume of 'The London Recordings', an attempt to evaluate beyond an incense-laden legend. Once more this offering bewilders. On the one hand, the Clementi B flat major Sonata, Op 12 No 1, is a brilliantly inclusive success, a marvel of virtuosity in the widest sense, one of colour and nuance, and perhaps above all one more human than glacial. The Ravel G major Concerto is more rigid than on other occasions. In *Gaspard de la nuit*, 'Ondine' is very much a chilling abstraction rather than the supernatural would-be enchantress of Bertrand's poem, while Ravel's *sans expression* marking in 'Le gibet' is taken literally, and 'Scarbo', moving at a surprisingly sedate tempo, misses the sort of diablerie you can hear from arguably lesser pianists such as Thibaudet and Pogorelich. In Chopin's Second Sonata the Funeral March is brisk and unceremonious (though the central

YEOL
EUM
SON
MOZART
complete
piano sonatas
naïve

MARCO BORGGREVE

Mozart Complete Piano Sonatas
Yeol Eum Son *pf*
Naïve V8049 (6 CDs)

For Yeol Eum Son, Mozart's music 'is sunshine and the everlasting night, boiling water and snowflakes, elegance and comedy, Lolita and Madonna … Mozart is totally emotional, highly strung, sweet and sour. Yet, there is some kind of transcendency of emotions. At the end of the day, he doesn't care. He is free – his feet are never firmly planted on the ground.'

Auditioning the 18 sonatas chronologically, spanning a period from 1775 (Munich, the first six) to 1789 (Vienna, the last two), from the days of the violin concertos to the late Clarinet Quintet, is to experience a multi-dimensional landscape. Clothing their variegated pages, their song, rondo and variation limbs, are any manner of borrowings and intimations. Symphonic gesture, chamber discourse, operatic aria. Throbbing *galant* strings, reedy serenade woodwinds. Slurs and tonguings. Divertimento, march, dance, concerto.

We all have our favourite Mozart players. Supplementing their Urtext offprints, Henle Verlag propose several for online viewing – some obvious, others less so, one or two historical greats in touching distance of the spirit if distant from current 'historically informed' performance practice. Arrau, Backhaus, Badura-Skoda, Barenboim, Chaimovich, Eschenbach, Feinberg, Fischer, Gieseking, Gilels, Haebler, Haskil, Horowitz, Kraus, Schein, Schnabel, Schiff, Sokolov, Uchida. In an interview with Claire Boisteau, Son nails her colours: 'For me, I want my relationship with Mozart to be just between the two of us. Sometimes, I almost don't want to learn how others relate to Mozart. I'd rather keep my beliefs private – it's what I see, what I believe. There is one person, though, who greatly influenced me. Wanda Landowska … I feel as free as a bird when I'm listening to [her]!'

Son's Mozart is boldly nuanced. Without disquieting our sensibilities, and with refined taste and sculpted shaping to the fore, she makes clear that a 2013 Steinway D is narratively central. Parodying a Viennese Stein, Streicher or Walter, or a Regency London Broadwood, doesn't come into the reckoning. Nor picturing crinoline curtsies or masked rococo balls. 'I always wanted to produce some "robust" Mozart – brutally passionate, dramatic and operatic, extremely capricious.' Brutality and extremity you won't find in the final mix. Everything else, yes – limpid joyousness, sprinklings of elaboration, a sense of improvised abandon increasingly simulating concert conditions. 'I just started playing and let things happen, unless I had very particular ideas about something. Or I would try every different idea in each run.'

Facility and natural brilliance aside, a characteristic of Son's playing over the years has been her tendency to infinitesimally hold back at the end of sections or phrases. In this cycle it proves less a mannerism, more a means of pointing structure and punctuating musical breath. Attentive to detail and dynamics – delighting in the flight and flowering of Mozart's roulades, his teasing play of scenes, characters and registers, solos, *tuttis* and cadenzas, embracing his half-smiles and wistfulness – she has a strong sense of architecture and harmonic progression. Repeats matter, second halves notably (excluding the problematic issue of the B flat major Sonata, K570). Likewise the working out of development sections, that of the A minor, K310, with its *quasi pizzicato* bass line, taking on a fevered power prophetically referenced. In the A major, K331, give or take, she broadly maintains the same tempo across the *grazioso* variations while opting in the (transiently elaborated) *Alla turca* finale for a ceremonially pulsed, plausibly janissary *allegretto* (crotchet=*c*120). Scenas and allusions flood her slow movements, Mozart's expressiveness and wheeling birdsong rhapsody, his rhythmic reverie, fragrant and blooming. Yet not without shadows and dark places.

Son isn't a miniaturist or understater. With her capacity to act out and elevate what she's playing, the C minor, K457, presented without the epic Fantasy with which it was paired on publication in 1785, is a fateful, tautly argued drama. The fermatas and key changes (as far as G flat) of the *Adagio* are moments of pregnant tension, poetry in the air. Hammering octaves, driven harmonies, disorientating diminished sevenths, agitation and pause, storm and silence, forge the finale into a cauldron of unrest, the rugged, independent Beethoven of 15 years later all but on stage. Occupying different ground, Son's readings of the post-*Figaro* F major, K533/494 (1788/86), B flat major, K570 ('perhaps the most completely rounded' of the Mozart canon, Alfred Einstein estimated), and D major, K576, emphasise their cultured contrapuntal/homophonic profiling. The 'little Sonata for beginners', K545, nestling in between, glows in schooled pianism, rounded sentences and disciplined pace: Son's unalloyed 'model of heaven'.

Stiff modern- or period-instrument competition notwithstanding, this is an engrossing set. Discerning studio values (producer Jin Choi at the Tongyeong Concert Hall, Korea, during January-June 2022) are matched by a piano sound that is spacious and musically imaged.

ATEŞ ORGA

benediction is movingly free and sensitive) and the eerie finale whirls at a speed only the transcendentally gifted would risk.

As so often with this pianist there are ups and downs, peaks and troughs. The BBC archive recordings are presented as Volume 1, so further issues are awaited with a mix of eagerness and apprehension.

BRYCE MORRISON

PIANO DUET

SOMM RECORDINGS
BEETHOVEN SYMPHONIES Vol.3
BEETHOVEN
Symphony No.2 in D major
Symphony No.7 in A major
Arr. Franz Xaver Scharwenka for piano duet
Tessa Uys
Ben Schoeman
piano duo

Beethoven
Symphonies (arr FX Scharwenka), Vol 3: No 2, Op 36; No 7, Op 92
Tessa Uys, Ben Schoeman *pf*
Somm SOMMCD0666

Continuing their Beethoven-Scharwenka cycle, Tessa Uys and Ben Schoeman face up to the Seventh Symphony, coupled with the Second. Xaver Scharwenka (1850-1924) published his Beethoven duet transcriptions in Vienna around 1905. In an exemplary booklet essay the composer Robert Matthew-Walker comments on the 'strong defining line from Scharwenka back to Beethoven himself: Scharwenka's teacher, Theodor Kullak, was a pupil of Czerny, who studied with Beethoven. This direct musical lineage cannot be gainsaid. It is a school of musical pianism and understanding coincidental to the development of the instrument itself.'

These skilled, imaginative arrangements are big-boned affairs, prompting one to muse that the domestic duettists of Mahler's and Zweig's pre-First World War Vienna or Busoni's Berlin must have been a generation of precocious facility. Uys and Schoeman handle content and texture impeccably and with empathic understanding. Under their hands (more so than with Duo Trenkner-Speidel, on MDG, from 2013), the music grows and climaxes, taut yet with time to reflect – and not just in the slow movements. Tempo and pulse are largely well gauged, a firm beat resolving issues often besetting the best conductors. Such is the sweep of texture and dynamics, the 'colouring' of canvas, the fierce march of temperament, that for much of the time the presence of an orchestra isn't missed. This is the first recording of this arrangement of No 2.

ATEŞ ORGA

PIANO CONCERTOS

NAXOS
RACHMANINOV
Piano Concertos Nos. 1 & 4
Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini
Boris Giltburg
Brussels Philharmonic · Vassily Sinaisky

Rachmaninov Piano Concertos Nos 1 & 4; Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini
Boris Giltburg *pf*
Brussels Philharmonic / Vassily Sinaisky
Naxos 8 574528

Since winning the Queen Elisabeth Competition in 2013, the Russian-born Israeli pianist Boris Giltburg has made critically acclaimed recordings of the complete Beethoven piano sonatas and concertos, Liszt's *Transcendental Études*, Prokofiev's three 'War Sonatas' and most of Rachmaninov's works for solo piano. With this recording he completes a survey of Rachmaninov's works for piano and orchestra.

In the first movement of the First Concerto he provides the requisite boldness and grandeur as well as much warm lyricism and light filigree. His Fazioli piano is always in ideal balance with the orchestra, and the long cadenza is well-paced, building to a thrilling climax. The slow movement is lovely and contains an exceptionally beautiful chromatic section. The finale is brilliant, characterised by an impish quality before the rousing final pages.

The Fourth Concerto, revised twice by the composer after its unsuccessful early performances, remains an elusive work, with episodic outer movements, much scampering passagework and few memorable melodies. Still, it contains inspired moments and some brilliant piano-writing. Giltburg and Sinaisky prove to be strong advocates for it, equal perhaps to the famous 1957 recording by Michelangeli. Here, the sad slow movement is the highlight, with some particularly lush playing from the orchestra.

The popular *Paganini* Rhapsody is an ideal showcase for Giltburg's talents. By turns he is playful (Vars 5 and 15), reflective (Var 11) and brimming with virtuosity (Vars 22-24). Particular highlights come in the middle of the piece, in the dark, ominous sound he gets for Var 17 and the evolution from relaxed contemplation to noble grandeur in Var 18. Sinaisky and the Brussels Philharmonic are alert and supportive; they shine notably in Var 14 and the brilliant final pages. The recorded sound is warm and clear throughout, and the booklet essay by the pianist is a model of concise and informative annotation.

CHARLES TIMBRELL

JAZZ

SIMONA PREMAZZI
WAVE IN GRAVITY solo piano

Simona Premazzi Wave in Gravity
Simona Premazzi *pf*
Premazzi PRE1174

It can take several listens to form a judgement on a new recording or to recognise its greatness, and this is true of Simona Premazzi's fine album. The Italian pianist now lives in New York and works with trumpeter Jeremy Pelt and saxophonist Greg Osby. She has five albums as leader, but this is her first solo.

She interprets standards beautifully – as in her revival of Cole Porter's rather neglected 'In the still of the night'. 'My heart stood still', with a boppish *misterioso* introduction and conclusion, receives one of the most compelling interpretations since Bill Evans's.

Premazzi's own compositions include the brief, gnarled 'Between spheres', and the idiosyncratic ballad 'I'll take a space ship and go and find you'. 'G minor thing' segues into an improvised interpretation of Bach's cantata *Wachet auf*. It's a post-bop but not avant-garde approach, not fully two-handed in the sense of employing stride or walking bass, with stylistic reminiscences of Andrew Hill and Thelonious Monk. The idiom is personal but not yet one immediately recognisable as Premazzi. Maybe that will develop in time. A beautiful release that grows on the listener, and a talent deserving wider recognition.

ANDY HAMILTON

Rachmaninow
Urtext
Morceaux de fantaisie
Opus 3
G. Henle Verlag

Rachmaninov
Morceaux de fantaisie, Op 3
G Henle Verlag HN 1491

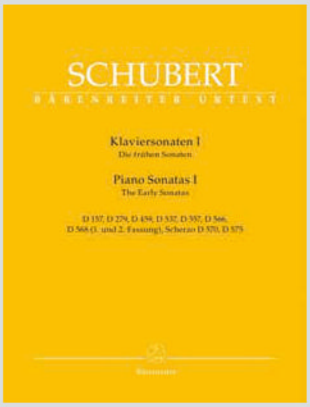
Though the celebrated C sharp minor Prelude remains one of Rachmaninov's best-loved miniatures (perhaps his most famous piano work), the five *Morceaux de fantaisie* to which it belongs are rarely heard together in concert as a complete work. Perhaps this is because 'Sérénade', the final piece, is so quiet and understated. Could it be that audiences and performers alike simply expect more virtuosity and panache at the end of a 20-minute suite? If so, then there would surely be nothing intrinsically wrong in juggling around the order of movements so that the extrovert 'Polichinelle' concluded this evocative, persuasive and highly contrasted set.

Boosey & Hawkes's much-used and -respected edition of these pieces remains convincing and authoritative today (currently available as Vol 3 in their set of the complete Rachmaninov piano works), but this new issue from Henle-Verlag continues the house's association with Marc-André Hamelin. As was the case with earlier issues of the Preludes and *Études-tableaux*, Hamelin gives some fascinating and useful fingerings. It is wonderful to gain technical benefits directly from a virtuoso of his stature. In particular the recommendations in the E flat minor 'Élégie' provide a convincing pathway towards improved clarity and enhanced finger legato. With excellent background notes from Dominik Rahmer and inclusion of the revised versions of both the 'Mélodie' and 'Sérénade', this is a most impressive issue.

KLEIN
BÄRENREITER URTEXT
Sonáta / Sonata / Sonate
Krajina / Landscape / Landschaft
Bärenreiter

Klein
Sonata, Landscape
Bärenreiter Urtext BA 9580

The Jewish-Czech pianist-composer Gideon Klein (1919-45) died in the Fürstengrube concentration camp after years of imprisonment by the Nazis. It was while being detained in Terezín that he composed most furiously, completing numerous Hebrew and folk choral arrangements, madrigal settings, chamber music and the Piano Sonata that dates from 1943. The sonata shows tremendously impressive technical command and intensity of purpose in an atonal idiom. Though only a fragment exists of what may well have been intended as a final fourth movement, the surviving three movements stand convincingly on their own, using pitch and intervallic centres as a means of bringing memorable logic and continuity to a style of writing that pushes forwards often with agitated angularity. The writing may be challenging but it is never over-burdened. Indeed, there is an attractive transparency to the textures of the outer movements, which flank the beguiling sweet dissonances contained in the elegiac central slow movement (a 41-bar miniature). As an added bonus we have the two-page melodrama *Landschaft* ('Landscape') with words for narrator carefully placed over the score (spartan and sporadically). This hauntingly lugubrious curiosity is thought to date from the start of the Second World War but was not given its first performance until 2016.



Schubert
Piano Sonatas,
Volume 1: The Early Sonatas
D157, D279, D459, D537, D557, D566, D568 (first and second versions), Scherzo D570, D575
Bärenreiter Urtext
BA 9642

For many pianists this collection of early Schubert sonatas will prove something of a revelation, not least because the music is so unfamiliar – only three of the sonatas presented in the hefty 180-page volume are performed at all frequently. Perhaps Schubert remains the most undiscovered of the great keyboard composers. Certainly, his solo keyboard output as a whole is still shockingly neglected, and this outstanding and most elegant issue is well worth exploring. Unlike the later sonatas, the earliest works by Schubert in sonata form are certainly approachable by pianists hovering around the Grade 7-8 mark. How sad that so many players have not had opportunities to explore and discover these riches – for treasures they unquestionably are.

Personally, I have never encountered the dancelike charm before of the second movement of the Sonata in E major, D157, nor the quasi-symphonic evocations present in the highly approachable first movement of the C major Sonata, D279. Indeed, Volume 1 of both ABRSM and Henle's celebrated collections of Schubert sonatas omit these works, beginning with the familiar D537 in A minor, here presented as the fourth work in chronological order. Bärenreiter also includes versions of D568 in both the revised key of E flat major as well as the original key of D flat. Many of us will not even realise that an earlier version a tone down exists in the first place. With immaculate notational layout, helpful editorial commentary and illuminating notes on aspects of performance relating to tempo changes, articulation, rhythm, notation and pedalling in particular, this is a must-have issue not only for the professional but also for the enthusiastic amateur player.

BY MURRAY McLACHLAN

A seemingly inexhaustible armoury of effects: Pavel Kolesnikov cast a spell at Wigmore Hall

EVA VERMANDEL

In concert

LONDON

Wigmore Hall
Imogen Cooper 25 March
Pavel Kolesnikov 4 April
Royal Festival Hall
Mitsuko Uchida 5 April

‘Smelling a new perfume is a bit like encountering a new piece of music,’ Pavel Kolesnikov told me in an interview for this magazine in 2020. ‘A perfume is built in chords, as in music, where there are low notes, middle notes, and top notes. And you can use those notes in different ways, getting them to cover each other.’ I was reminded of this aperçu many times during the latest Wigmore appearance by this young Russian pianist – and noted connoisseur of perfumes – as he sat with his upper body immobile, watching intently as his hands wove their spells below.

Apart from a dreamy little encore by Messiaen – *La colombe* – there were no pieces new to me in his programme: Schubert’s D935 Impromptus and a selection of waltzes, nocturnes and mazurkas by Chopin. But the Chopin took me into new worlds. Rather than being linked by a shared and unifying style, the pieces were allowed to flower each in its own way, with Kolesnikov keeping us on tenterhooks for the next surprise in store.

The result was an evening of lovely revelations, purveyed with a touch that ran the gamut between velvet softness – his particular virtuosity lies in his finely calibrated *pianissimos* – and rolling thunder. The shortest piece, Chopin’s C major Mazurka, Op 33 No 3, lasted barely a minute, yet the residue it left in the mind was substantial. The longest piece, the Waltz in A minor, Op 34 No 2, encompassed an engaging series of discrete worlds. The Op 27 No 2 Nocturne had a desolate majesty, while the wistful Op 17 No 4 Mazurka became a journey punctuated by anguished pauses. The selection was beautifully strung together.

Kolesnikov approached the Schubert works with a completely different touch, smoothly muting the contrasting colours of the first and trading for expressiveness on its switches between major and minor. He permitted the magnificence of the second piece to emerge only gradually, and his brilliant account of the mercurial fourth drew on a seemingly inexhaustible armoury of effects.

On 25 March I heard Imogen Cooper play Liszt, Schubert, and Beethoven’s Op 109 and Op 111 sonatas, and later I heard Mitsuko Uchida play the final three sonatas. My impression of Uchida’s account of these works – performed without an interval – was that her overwhelming priority was to achieve an intimate expressiveness, a confidentiality of tone. Every note was allowed to breathe, even if only in a whisper; the recitatives and *arioso* sections of Op 110 had an intense eloquence, as did the mounting excitement of the close of that sonata. Uchida is greatly loved and commanded a rare stillness in the packed auditorium.

Imogen Cooper’s Beethoven seemed to prioritise the sculptural and structural. It felt a bit relentless in the variations of Op 109, too unremittingly forceful for the poetry fully to come through. But in the first movement of Op 111 the colouring and shading had a bracingly analytical effect, throwing the complex structure into high relief. And Cooper’s account of the final movement was masterly beyond words, the trill-garlanded section suddenly warm and sweet, and leading to the most joyful of valedictions.

MICHAEL CHURCH

Live Review

Innovative programming: Víkingur Ólafsson played Glass, Galuppi, Mozart and Cimarosa in Lucerne

LUCERNE

Piano festival 'Le piano symphonique'
7-11 February

A harpsichord recital given in the deep end of an empty swimming pool immediately signalled that Lucerne's latest festival, 'Le piano symphonique', would be taking a distinctly innovative approach to its flamboyant celebration of the keyboard. This annual event aims to peer closely into an instrument it describes as 'the navel of the world of music'. It proclaims that 'symphonies are written on the piano, even operas and pious masses. Or chamber music. Nothing works without the piano.'

That sentiment would certainly ring true with the many distinguished musical figures who have loved Lucerne. Ringed by snowy mountains and bordered by its sparkling lake, the Swiss city has long held a particular fascination for composers and performers. Wagner and Rachmaninov lived and worked in villas by the water; Schumann, Mendelssohn, Brahms, Bruckner and Liszt were frequent visitors; Rimsky-Korsakov came for his honeymoon, Scriabin for holidays; Toscanini found refuge here from Salzburg when the Nazis annexed Austria.

The piano was central to the lives of all those great names, and the city is proud of its association with such a pantheon, so the Lucerne Symphony Orchestra has devised a festival to reflect the city's sometimes unrecognised place as a cradle of musical creation, inviting the cream of the keyboard world to help them celebrate.

After Saint-Saëns and Brahms in 2021 and 2022, this February the festival's focus was on Schumann, with **Martha Argerich** giving a characteristically commanding account of the Piano Concerto in A minor, Op 54, at the city's main KKL concert hall, with Michael Sanderling conducting. The orchestra's dynamic intendant, Numa Bischof Ullmann, says 'programming is like painting' and, reaching for his palette to find a good match for the Schumann, he settled upon Brahms's Third Symphony, because he believes of all the composer's symphonies the Third is the most pianistic.

With the orchestral quality of the instrument at the forefront it was only natural for **Rudolf Buchbinder** to present Schumann's titanic *Études symphoniques*, Op 13, pairing them with Beethoven's *Appassionata* Sonata, Op 57, while **Marie-Ange Nguci** chose Schumann's *Études in Variation Form on a Theme by Beethoven*, adding two Ligeti Études and Beethoven's final Piano Sonata, Op 111.

The festival's policy of encouraging pianists to learn new repertoire saw 19-year-old **Yoav Levanon** presented with the challenge of learning Paderewski's daunting and rarely heard A minor Piano Concerto, Op 17. Critics praised his coolly assured account. 'There was something deftly understated about his performance that drew you in,' said one. In another piece of innovative programming **Víkingur Ólafsson** appeared in the same concert, characteristically matching works by Philip Glass with examples by Galuppi, Mozart and Cimarosa, and closing with a piece written for him last year, Edmund Finnis's *Mirror Images*.

Schumann's *Kreisleriana* was bound to find its way into the mix and **Lukáš Vondráček** obliged at a lunchtime concert, adding the C major *Arabesque*, Op 18, for good measure. Later, **Khatia Buniatishvili** took the focus away from Schumann with Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto, appearing with the Orchestra of the Suisse Romande under Jonathan Nott.

Martha Argerich returned to close the week with her friends the cellist **Mischa Maisky** and baritone **Thomas Hampson** in a concert that included Chopin's Op 65 Cello Sonata and – perhaps inevitably – Schumann's song-cycle *Dichterliebe*.

And that harpsichord. In an empty swimming pool? Really? Yes. It seemed crazy but your correspondent was won over by the surprising warmth this lent the colour of the instrument as **Jean Rondeau** worked his way carefully through a programme of ever-expanding complexity and dynamism, from Rameau, through Couperin to Royer. The pool, complete with high dive board, is now a new cultural centre, naturally named Neubad.

As a postcript to this year's festival, **Krystian Zimerman** was scheduled to appear with violinist Marysia Nowak, viola player Katarzyna Budnik and cellist Yuya Okamoto to play two of Brahms's piano quartets in April but the concert was postponed due to illness.

Next year's 'Piano symphonique' festival will take place from 16 to 21 January, with the programme announced in the early summer. Currently, students from the Lucerne Music Academy are building a website detailing the deep musical legacy to be found here. Something to watch out for if you are planning a trip to this city of music.

STEPHEN PRITCHARD

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Live Review

Mariamna Sherling (left) and Shunta Morimoto give contrasting and impressive performances in a competition showcase in Hastings, with the RPO conducted by Rory Macdonald

Peter Mould
stagescapes.com

HASTINGS

Hastings International Piano Concerto Competition
Prize Winners' Gala Concert
Shunta Morimoto; Mariamna Sherling *pfs*
Royal Philharmonic Orchestra /
Rory Macdonald
White Rock Theatre, Hastings
4 March

Paint-peeling beach-side bars, shuttered ice-cream shops and a dozing pier – these are the hallmarks of an off-duty English seaside town and Hastings bears them all. But it also has the White Rock Theatre, the former 1927 pavilion that once hosted performances by Cortot, Horowitz and, in 1935 and 1936, Rachmaninov. The distinctive art deco venue was the base for the Hastings Music Festival for much of the 20th century, from which developed the biennial Hastings International Piano Concerto Competition, where, a short distance from the 1066 site, battles of the keyboard variety take place. While the promenade is in need of a spring clean, tonight the White Rock Theatre is resplendent: floral displays delineate the Steinway that has been brought in especially for this concert, which features the winners of the 2022 instalment of the concerto contest.

Curled over the keys, Shunta Morimoto is an unassuming performer, but it is when he reaches the cadenza in the first movement of Beethoven's Fourth Concerto – playing one of the composer's own – that we understand why he scooped first prize. Morimoto, a former participant at the Van Cliburn junior event, is careful and attentive in subsequent movements, maintaining a strong connection with conductor Rory Macdonald, who directs the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra (RPO). Morimoto faced stiff competition to get here: 360 pianists applied to take part in the series, with 40 musicians attending rounds in Hastings to compete for the first prize and £15,000.

From the playful opening theme through to the scurrying ending, third prize-winner Mariamna Sherling's performance of Rachmaninov's *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini* is as colourful as the pedestal flowers bookending the stage. A seasoned competition winner and current student at Moscow's Tchaikovsky Conservatory, Sherling impresses in the percussive melodies of Variations 9 and 19. Some of the quieter interior variations might have benefited from subtler shading, particularly from the RPO. Nonetheless, Sherling's barnstorming playing in Variation 23 leaves no one in any doubt that this is a pianist – and a competition – to watch.

CLAIRE JACKSON

Entries to the 2024 instalment of the Hastings International Piano Concerto Competition open soon: hastingsinternationalpiano.org

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Charles Timbrell traces the recorded history of this masterpiece from Chopin's last decade

THE LEGACY OF BYRON JANIS

Ateş Orga traces the career of the American pianist Byron Janis, who has turned 95

INTERVIEW BY JEREMY NICHOLAS

Finding inspiration

KAUKO KIKKAS

Danny Driver recalls recordings that have shaped his relationship with music that is central to his own repertoire

Dinu Lipatti playing Chopin Waltzes was one of the LPs my parents had. I was probably six or seven when I started to listen to it. It inspired me, I remember, to make my first attempt at playing them – the B minor and the so-called 'Farewell' Waltz. There's something magnetic about those recordings. Of course, the execution is so flawless, so clean, so clear, so well-crafted and yet so effortless. I sensed that even as a young musician. There are many other fine recordings of the Waltzes where you marvel but after a few you think 'Hmm, I need to hear something else now'. With the Lipatti I want to listen literally from start to finish and don't tire of it for a second. Always finding something new, always alive, always reinventing and reimagining. It's extraordinary playing.

About the same time as I began to play the 'Farewell' Waltz, I was also introduced to *Kinderszenen*. My father bought the LP of Martha Argerich playing it together with *Kreisleriana*, which I didn't know at all. I think the shorter pieces matched my attention span quite well. *Kreisleriana* remained a mystery. I remember making a tape recording of it from the LP for some reason and copying out the titles of the movements which were bewildering because I had no idea about German. I mean 'Äusserst bewegt' and 'Sehr langsam'? What *were* these things? But there must have been something that struck a very deep chord because *Kreisleriana* became a very important piece for me. I've played it a lot and keep coming back to it. Listening to this recording again, it is so spontaneous and precise yet you feel that things are just about to boil over.

The first piece of Ravel I learnt was *Jeux d'eau* when I was about 13 or 14. My father was very keen on classical music and was always consulting the *Penguin Guide* to see what was the recommended recording. So out came Perlemuter in his late recording of *Jeux d'eau*, *Gaspard de la nuit* and *Miroirs* made, I think, in the '80s for Nimbus, without edits in the ballroom at Wyastone. In a sense, it did inform my own performance of the work. I can see its faults now – it's not always clean or precise – but I was bewitched at the time and there is still something other-worldly about it. I mean in 'Ondine', for example, he doesn't do very much and yet every phrase leaves something unsaid and you're waiting for the next one. *Gaspard* is obviously a very virtuosic work but for me if the fireworks – even in 'Scarbo' – become too obvious, too openly displayed, then somehow you break out of this deeply symbolic, sinister, mysterious world. It becomes too real.

I grew up as a chamber musician as much as a solo pianist, and one of the things I enjoyed playing most were the two piano quartets of Fauré. I wasn't familiar with the solo piano music till much later. It was an article by Bryce Morrison about the Barcarolles and Nocturnes in *Gramophone* many years ago in which he extolled the pianist Germaine Thyssens-Valentin. I looked her up and started listening. For this elusive music, she has all the qualities: for it to hover almost on a knife-edge, not to be too demonstrative, flexibility without distortion, distance without lack of clarity, early touch without being too pointed and obvious, the whole thing sounding so natural both on the surface and in its deepest structures. She does all that. She really does! I'm recording some Fauré later this year. I play differently, but these recordings are an inspiration.

Richter was a pianist I came to back in my student days at Cambridge and the Royal College. He wasn't my favourite, and I responded badly to his sounds on record. I was studying with Irina Zaritskaya and she was all about producing a really rich and beautiful sound. Her professor in Russia had been Yakov Flier. But Richter was a pianist who – despite what we say about the sound – could produce the most incredible range of sonority. At his most brutal I can understand why some people recoil. But there is great tenderness in this performance of *Pictures at an Exhibition*. 'The Old Castle' – you think it's going to be broken up too much, but no. Paradoxically, he somehow enhances the continuity. It has this great sense of loss and antiquity. 'Baba Yaga' is just blistering and the bells are simply clangorous. They really sound like bells! Extraordinary. He transcends completely the nature of the instrument. It becomes something else in his hands. **IP**

Chopin
14 Waltzes
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Schumann
Kinderszenen, Kreisleriana
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Ravel
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Fauré
Barcarolles, Nocturnes
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